

S E R M O N S

ON SEVERAL

SUBJECTS *and* OCCASIONS,

By the most Reverend

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L A T E

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L O N D O N:

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DR JOHN TILLOTSON



L O N D O N :



S E R M O N CXXXI.

Concerning our imitation of the divine perfections.

M A T T. v. 48.

Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.

IN these words we have, first, the absolute perfection of the divine nature supposed, not only in those before-mentioned, of goodness, and mercy, and patience; but in all other excellencies whatsoever. S E R M.
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Secondly, The perfection of God is propounded as a pattern for our imitation.

In the handling of these two particulars, I propounded to proceed in this method.

I. To shew how we are to conceive of the divine perfection.

II. To lay down some rules, by which we may rectify and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of God.

III. To shew how far we are to imitate the perfections of God, and particularly what those divine qualities are which our SAVIOUR doth here more especially propound to our imitation.

IV. To clear the true meaning of this precept; and to shew that the duty here intended by our SAVIOUR is not impossible to us; and then to draw some useful inferences from the whole.

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The two first I have already spoken to, I now proceed to the third particular, which is, to shew how far we are to imitate the perfections of God, and particularly what those divine qualities are, which our SAVIOUR doth here more especially propound to our imitation. For though these words do suppose the absolute perfection of the divine nature, yet because there are several perfections of God which are incommunicable, and a creature, as such, is utterly incapable of them, these cannot be supposed to be intended for a pattern to us. As the necessity and independency of the divine nature; and the self-sufficiency of it to his own happiness; to be the original cause of all things; and consequently supreme Lord and Governor; the immensity and eternity of his being; these, and perhaps several other perfections, are incommunicable to a creature; and it would be an unsufferable pride, and a kind of high treason against the divine Majesty, and a sottish ignorance of the necessary bounds and limits of our own state, as we are creatures, to think to resemble God in these excellencies, of which the condition of a creature is utterly incapable. This was the sin of Lucifer; an ambition to step into the throne of God, and to be like the most High.

So that in our imitation of the divine perfection, we are to keep within the station of creatures, not affecting an independency and sovereignty like the most High, and to be omnipotent as he is, “to have an arm like God, and to thunder with a voice like him,” as the expression is in Job: but to endeavour to resemble him, *pro modulo creaturæ*, “according to the rate and capacity of a creature,” in those divine qualities, and in such measures and degrees,

degrees, as our finite and dependent nature is capable of.

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More especially and chiefly in the moral perfections of the divine nature, such as are his goodness, and mercy, and patience, his justice, and truth, and faithfulness; these, and only these, the scripture seems to comprehend under the name of holiness; not all the excellencies of the divine nature in general, but those which we call moral excellencies and perfections, such as those which I have named; for with these, and hardly with any other, is the holiness of God joined in scripture, as “holy” and righteous, holy and true,” &c. And therefore when God says, “be ye holy, for I am holy,” it signifies that we are to imitate God in his goodness, and mercy, and patience, and righteousness, and faithfulness, and truth; for these are the holiness of the divine nature, which set him at the greatest distance from that which we call moral impurity and sin.

For that which our SAVIOUR here in the text more peculiarly recommends to our imitation, is the goodness of God, of which his mercy and patience are two eminent branches. The mercy of God is his goodness to those that are in misery, or are liable to it. The patience of God is his mercy in sparing those who have deserved punishment, and are liable to it. And the goodness of God is then greatest, when it is exercised towards the evil and unthankful; those who are so far from deserving it, that they have given great and just provocations to the contrary. And this affectionate temper of mind, which is so remarkable in God towards the unworthy and unthankful sons of men, our SAVIOUR recommends to our imitation here in the text. “Be

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“ ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which
 “ is in heaven is perfect.” Be ye therefore ; this
 particle of inference therefore, hath a plain relation
 to something spoken before ; and if we look back
 to ver. 44. we shall find our SAVIOUR there enjoyn-
 ing his disciples “ to love their enemies, to bless
 “ them that curse them, to do good to them that
 “ hate them, and to pray for those that despight-
 “ fully use them, and persecute them.” And by
 what other argument doth he inforce the practice
 of this difficult duty, but by telling us, that this is
 to be like God, to be good to the evil and un-
 thankful, ver. 45. “ That ye may be the children
 “ of your heavenly Father, who maketh his sun to
 “ rise on the evil and the good ; and his rain to
 “ fall on the just, and on the unjust.” God is
 good to all, and exerciseth great mercy and patience
 even towards the evil, and unjust. And then he
 concludes, that if perfection it self be fit to be a pat-
 tern, we should labour after these qualities, “ Be
 “ ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which
 “ is in heaven is perfect.” So that though the uni-
 versal perfection of the divine nature be here supposed,
 yet the attributes of his goodness, and mercy, and
 patience, are here particularly pointed at, and pro-
 pounded to us for our pattern ; and the precept of
 imitating the divine perfection is more especially
 to be understood of those perfections which our SA-
 VIOUR had been discoursing of before, viz. the
 goodness and mercy of God. And that this is un-
 doubtedly so, is evident from St. Luke’s rendring
 this precept, Ch. vi. 36. “ Be ye therefore οἰκτιρ-
 “ μους, *benefici*, ready to do good, full of kind-
 “ ness and benignity ; merciful, as your Father which
 “ is in heaven is merciful ;” that is, endeavour you

to be such as I have described God to be. And ^{S F R M.} ^{CXXXI.} this St. Matthew calls perfection; because the goodness of God is his great perfection, and the glory of the divine nature, that which reflects a lustre and beauty upon all his other attributes, and takes off the terror of them. From all which it is plain, what those perfections of the divine nature are, which our SAVIOUR doth here particularly recommend to our imitation. I come now, in the

Fourth and last place, To clear the true meaning of this precept; and to shew, that the duty here required, and intended by our SAVIOUR, (when he says, "Be ye perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect") is not impossible to us. And to this purpose, be pleased to consider these three or four things.

1. That our imitation of God is certainly restrained to the communicable perfections of God, and such as creatures are capable of, as I have shewn before. For it is so far from being a duty to affect or attempt to be like God in his peculiar perfections, that it was, probably, the sin of the apostate angels.

2. Our imitation of the divine perfections, which are communicable to creatures, is likewise to be restrained to such degrees of these perfections, as creatures are capable of. For no creature can ever be so perfectly good, as God is; nor partake of any other excellency, in that transcendent degree, in which the divine nature is possessed of it.

3. But there is no manner of inconvenience in having a pattern propounded to us of so great perfection, as is above our reach to attain to; and there may be great advantages in it. The way to excel in any kind is, *optima quæque exempla ad imitandum proponere,*

proponere, “to propose the highest and most perfect examples to our imitation.” No man can write after too perfect and good a copy; and though he can never reach the perfection of it, yet he is like to learn more, than by one less perfect. He that aims at the heavens, which yet he is sure to come short of, is like to shoot higher than he that aims at a mark within his reach.

Besides, that the excellency of the pattern, as it leaves room for continual improvement, so it kindles ambition, and makes men strain and contend to the utmost to do better: and though he can never hope to equal the example before him, yet he will endeavour to come as near it as he can. So that a perfect pattern is no hindrance, but an advantage rather to our improvement in any kind.

4. If any thing can be supposed to be our duty, which is absolutely beyond our power, a precept of this nature may with as much reason be supposed to be so, as any thing that can be instanced in: because in such a case, if we do our best, and be continually pressing forward towards the mark, though we can never reach it, yet we do very commendably; and whatever the law may require to try and raise our obedience, yet in all equitable interpretation, such a will and endeavour will be acceptable with God for the deed. For if the perfection of the law do really exceed our ability, and be beyond the possibility of our performance, the assurance we have of God's goodness will sufficiently secure us from any danger and prejudice upon that account. And we may reasonably presume, that to do all we can towards the fulfilling of this precept, will be as acceptable to God, and as beneficial to our selves, as if our power had been greater, and we had perfectly

ly fulfilled it. If our heavenly Father, to try the readiness and chearfulness of our obedience, bid us do that which he knows we cannot do, though we can do something towards it, we may be sure that he will be very well pleased when he sees, that in obedience to him we have done all that we could. And we may in this case reason as our SAVIOUR does; "If we that are evil would deal thus with our children, how more shall our heavenly Father?" The goodness of God signifies very little, if it does not signify this, that in any instance of real and unquestionable goodness, God is much better than any father upon earth.

However at the worst, that wherein we fall short of the perfection of the law, may be supplied on our part, by an humble acknowledgment of our own weakness and imperfection, and on God's part, by mercy and forgiveness, for the sake of the perfect obedience of our blessed Redeemer. This is the least benefit we can expect in this case from the grace, and mercy, and equity of the gospel.

5. And lastly, which will fully clear this matter, this precept does not oblige us to come up to a perfect equality with the pattern propounded to us, but only imports a vigorous imitation of it; that we be perpetually ascending and climbing up higher, still advancing from one degree of goodness to another, and continually aspiring after a nearer resemblance to God: and this certainly is possible to us, to endeavour to be as like God as we can, in this weak and imperfect state.

Whereas any equality with God, even in the communicable attributes of his goodness, and mercy, and patience, is not only impossible to us in this state of sin and imperfection, but above the condition of

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a creature, even of “ the spirits of just men made perfect,” and of the highest angels in glory : for their perfection is not absolute, but in comparison with our present state. And I think there is no great reason to doubt, but that the blessed spirits above, who continually behold the face of their Father, are still writing after this copy, which is here propounded to us ; and endeavouring “ to be perfect, as their Father which is in heaven is perfect ;” still aspiring after a nearer and more perfect resemblance of God, whose goodness and mercy is so far beyond, and before that of any creature, that they may be for ever approaching nearer to it, and yet never overtake it.

And this seems to be no inconsiderable ingredient, and enhancement of the happiness of heaven, that the holiness of good men (which is the similitude of God) is never at a stand, nor at it’s full growth and period ; but that the glorified saints (yea and blessed angels too) may be continually growing and improving, and they themselves still become better and happier to all eternity. And this in my apprehension is no undervaluing the happiness of heaven, that it is not so perfect at first, as it shall be afterwards ; because it is granted on all hands, that the happiness of those good souls, who are already in bliss, shall be more perfect and complete at the resurrection. And why may it not then be continually increasing, and be augmented still more and more, without any stint or final period of it’s perfection ? In this world we are apt to faint in a long course of goodness, and to be weary of well doing. But in the other state, when men shall be strongly byassed to goodness, and have nothing to pull them back, it will then be so far from being a trouble, that methinks it should

should be a mighty pleasure to the blessed, to find that there is no end of their doing good and becoming better. For if conformity to GOD be the ground and foundation of all happiness, then our blessedness will advance proportionably, as we grow more and more like to him. This, I confess, were a dismal consideration, to think that in heaven we should be liable to relapse, to go backward, or fall from that holy and happy state. But this is a comfortable consideration, that our holiness and happiness shall never be at a stand, that it is secure so far as it goes, and that we cannot lose what we have once attained, as we may do in this world. This, methinks, should be a trouble to no man, that as good and happy as he is at first, he shall still be better and better, more and more happy without end.

But be that as it will, and as GOD pleaseth (for we do but talk in the dark about our future state,) this is certain, that an equality with GOD in any of his perfections is not to be attained by any creature, and therefore cannot be thought to be the meaning of this precept: But that which our SAVIOUR requires, is a vigorous imitation of this pattern; that we have this example of the divine perfection always before us, and that we be continually endeavouring, as much as in us lies, to bring ourselves to the nearest resemblance of GOD, that possibly we can. And if this be our sincere care and study, we need not doubt but that it will find acceptance with GOD, and that he will be graciously pleased to esteem us for his children; and if there need a pardon for it, that GOD will forgive us where we fall short of the perfection of that pattern, which we can never imitate to perfection.

And happy were it for us, if this were all the ground of our fear and trouble, that when we had

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done all we could, we must still fall much short of the perfection of God's law, and the duty therein laid upon us. Alas ! which of us does near so much as we can, and is not conscious to himself that it is through his own fault and neglect, that he is so unlike his heavenly Father in goodness and mercy, in righteousness and true holiness ; and that he still partakes in so great a measure of those, not only unreasonable and brutish, but even devilish passions of malice and hatred, of rage and cruelty, of impatience and implacable revenge ; and that these ungod-like qualities do so frequently prevail upon us, and have so much dominion over us !

We are so far from being what we ought, in these and many other respects, that we are far from what we might be, if we would mind our duty with care and conscience, and make it our sincere endeavour to subdue ourselves to a conformity to God, and to a perfect holiness in his fear.

Would we but often set God before our eyes, and represent to ourselves those excellent and amiable perfections of the divine nature, which are so comfortable and beneficial to us, and to which we stand so infinitely obliged, his goodness and mercy and patience, upon which all our hopes of happiness do depend, and to which we are indebted, that we are not miserable past recovery ; that goodness and patience which he continually exerciseth towards us, (for we provoke him every day,) and exerciseth towards us, on purpose to endear those perfections to us, from which we reap so much comfort and advantage ; that by the pattern of perfection it self, and the example of him who is so much above us, so no ways obliged to us, nor tied by any interest to be concerned for us ; and who being happy in himself, neither

hopes

hopes nor fears any thing from us : I say, by an example that has all these advantages, we might be provoked to be so affected towards one another, (who have mutual obligations one to another, and mutual expectations of good or evil one from another) as we have always found God to be towards us, and as we desire he should still continue ; and miserable creatures are we, whenever he ceaseth to be so : and we have reason to fear he will cease to be so, if this example of his goodness and patience towards us, do not transform us into the image of the divine perfections, and prevail upon us to imitate those excellencies, which we have so much reason to approve and admire, and be in love withal.

These considerations, taken both from ingenuity and interest, should awaken our sloth, and stir up our most resolute and vigorous endeavours after that perfection which our SAVIOUR here requires, and make us ashamed of our lazy complaints, that our duty is set so high, that the endeavours of our whole life cannot reach it ; when yet we have hardly made one step towards it, and are so remiss and unconcerned about it, as if we could do it at any time with the greatest ease, and at an hour's warning, before we leave the world, could fulfill this precept of our LORD, of " being perfect, as our Father which is in heaven is perfect."

And yet, let me tell you, so far as any of us are from resembling our heavenly Father in some good degree and measure, so far are we distant from heaven, and the temper of the blessed ; so far are we utterly unqualified for the blissful sight and enjoyment of God : for unless we be first like him, we cannot see him as he is : only " the pure in heart shall see God," and therefore " every man that has this
" hope

S E R M. "hope in him," should "purify himself even as
CXXXI. "he is pure."

And thus I have, as briefly as I could, dispatched the four things I propounded for the explication of this text; namely, how we are to conceive of the divine perfections, and to give some rules to regulate and govern our opinions concerning the attributes and perfections of God; to explain the extent of this duty, and vindicate the possibility of it.

All that now remains, is to draw some useful inferences from this discourse which I have made; and they shall be these two.

I. That the strongest and surest reasonings in religion, are grounded upon the essential perfections of God.

II. That the truest and most substantial practice of religion, consists in the imitation of God.

I. That the strongest and surest reasonings in religion, are grounded upon the essential perfections of God; so that even divine revelation it self doth suppose these for it's foundation, and can signify nothing to us, unless these be first known and believed. Unless we be first persuaded of the providence of God, and his particular care of mankind, why should we believe that he would make any revelation of himself to men? Unless it be naturally known to us, that God is true, what foundation is there for the belief of his word? And what signifies the laws and promises of God, unless natural light do first assure us of his sovereign authority and faithfulness? So that the principles of natural religion, are the foundation of that which is revealed; and therefore, in reason, nothing can be admitted to be a revelation from God, which plainly contradicts his essential perfection, and, consequently, if any pretends di-
vine

vine revelation for this doctrine, that God hath from all eternity absolutely decreed the eternal ruin of the greatest part of mankind, without any respect to the sins and demerits of men, I am as certain that this doctrine cannot be of God, as I am sure that God is good and just: because this grates upon the notion that mankind have of goodness and justice. This is that which no good man would do, and therefore cannot be believed of infinite goodness; and therefore if "an apostle or angel from heaven" teach any doctrine which plainly overthrows the goodness and justice of God, "let him be accursed." For every man hath greater assurance that God is good and just, than he can have of any subtle speculations about predestination and the decrees of God.

And for the same reason I cannot believe, upon the pretended authority or infallibility of any man or church in the world, that God would not have men understand their publick prayers, and the lessons of scripture which are read to them. A lesson not to be understood is nonsense: a lesson is something to be learned, which how it can be without being understood, is hard to comprehend.

And as little can I believe, upon the authority of any person or church whatsoever, that God should reveal his will to men in the holy scriptures, with a design to have it hid, and locked up from the generality of mankind in an unknown tongue. And much less can I believe (which yet is the express doctrine of the council of Trent) that the saving efficacy of the sacrament depends upon the intention of the priest. Which is to say, that though people believe, and live never so well, they may be damned by sholes and whole parishes together, at the pleasure of the priest, and for no other reason, but because he is so wicked

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wicked as not to intend to save them. Can any man believe this, that hath any tolerable notion of God's goodness? May we not in this case appeal, as Abraham did, to the goodness and justice of God, and expostulate with greater reason than he did, much after the same manner, "Wilt thou destroy the righteous for the wicked; that be far from thee to do after this manner." To damn the righteous for the wicked, and that righteous people should lye at the mercy of a wicked priest, to be damned or saved at his pleasure, "that be far from thee; shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" And can there be a greater affront to the goodness and justice of God, than to imagine he should deal with men after this manner? If this be to do right, there is no possibility of doing wrong.

And to give but one instance more; I can never believe, upon the authority of any man, or church whatsoever, that our SAVIOUR, in the celebration of his last supper, did with his own hands give away his own natural body into the hands of his disciples, and give his blood shed, before it was shed; that the whole doctrine of Christianity should mainly rely upon the evidence of miracles, the assurance of which depends upon the certainty of sense; and yet that an essential part of that doctrine should overthrow the certainty of sense. I can never while I live believe these two things, that the last thing our SAVIOUR did before his death, should be to teach his disciples not to believe their own senses, as he must do if he taught them transubstantiation; and that the very first thing he did after he was risen from the dead, should be to teach them the quite contrary, by appealing to the certainty of sense for the proof of his resurrection; for when they doubted of his resurrection,

rection, Luke xxiv. 38. "He said unto them, Why
"are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in
"your hearts? Behold my hands and my feet, that
"it is I my self: handle me, and see, for a spirit
"hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." If
this be a good argument, that it was a real body
which they saw, because they saw and felt flesh and
bones: is it not as good an argument on the other
side, that what they saw in the sacrament was
not his real and natural body, because they could
neither see nor handle flesh and bones? So that
I cannot believe transubstantiation, unless I can
believe that truth itself can contradict and destroy
itself.

You see of what use it is to have right and steady
apprehensions of the divine perfections; that, these
being laid for a foundation, we may upon all occa-
sions have recourse to them, and govern our opi-
nions and Reasonings in religion, about all doubtful
matters, by such principles as are clear and unques-
tionable. The

II. Inference is, that the truest and most substan-
tial practice of religion, consists in the imitation of
the divine perfections, especially the moral perfec-
tions of the divine nature, which the scripture is
wont to comprehend under the name of holiness;
and such are the goodness, and mercy, and patience
of God, his justice, and truth, and faithfulness.
To imitate God in these is true religion; or as St.
James expresses it, "pure religion, and undefiled,"
ἀμίαντος, without any flaw or blemish, alluding
to precious stones, the greatest commendation of
which is to be clear and without flaw. *Religio est,*
imitari quem colis, "that is religion, to imitate him
"whom we worship." This the heathens, by the

light of nature, did discover to be the great end of religion, and the best worship of the deity, to be like God. Pythagoras was wont to say, "that we honour God most, when we are most like him in the temper and disposition of our minds;" and Plato to the same purpose, "that the height and perfection of goodness, is to resemble God, as near as is possible; and that we resemble God, in being just, and holy, and wise." So likewise Hierocles, "that a good man imitates God, in the measures of love and friendship, who hates no man, and extends his benignity to all mankind." Plutarch hath an excellent discourse about the patience of God towards sinners, and gives this as one reason why God doth not presently punish offenders; "that he might give an example to us of gentleness and patience, and check the fury and violence of men in revenging injuries upon one another; which nothing will do more effectually, than to consider that gentleness and forbearance are an imitation of the divine perfection." And then he cites an excellent saying of Plato, "that God manifested himself, and displayed his perfections in the world, for our imitation; true virtue being nothing else, but an imitation of the divine nature. For there is no greater benefit man can receive from God's hand, than to become virtuous by the imitation and pursuit of those excellencies and perfections which are in God." Seneca likewise hath many passages to this purpose, *inter viros bonos ac Deum amicitia est, imò etiam necessitudo & similitudo*, "between God and good men there is a friendship, yea, and an intimacy and likeness;" and that a virtuous man is *discipulus amulatorque & vera progenies Dei*, "a disciple

“ciple and imitator, and the very genuine offspring of God.” So that the light of nature and the reason of mankind, have always placed the perfection of religion in the imitation of the divine excellencies and perfections.

And this is very agreeable to the language and sense of the holy scriptures, which every where make the practice of religion to consist in our conformity to God, and the laws which he hath given us; which are nothing else but a transcript of his nature. The great business of religion is to do the will of God, and “this is the will of God, our sanctification;” and our sanctification is our conformity to the holiness of God; and this is the scope of the general exhortations of scripture, to persuade us to holiness, that is, to an imitation of the moral perfections of the divine nature. 2 Cor. vii.

1. “Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved; let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfect holiness in the fear of God.” 1 Pet. i. 15, 16. “As he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation, because it is written, be ye holy, for I am holy,” 2 Pet. i. 3, 4. speaking of the Christian religion, which he calls “the knowledge of him who hath called us to glory and virtue, whereby also (says he) are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises, that by these we might be partakers of a divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.” So that the holiness the gospel designs to bring us to, is a participation of the divine nature, which we can no otherwise partake of, but by an imitation of the divine perfections. This is that which the scripture expresses to us by the

terms of regeneration, the new man, and the new creature. And therefore those who are converted from a wicked and sinful state, and reclaimed to goodness, are said “to put on the new man, which “after God is created in righteousness, and the holiness of truth.” Eph. iv. 23. “To be renewed after the image of him that created us.” Colos. iii. 10. This is to be the sons and children of God, to “imitate and resemble God in our dispositions and “manners. Eph. v. 1. “Be ye therefore, *μίμηται* “*τῷ Θεῷ*, imitators of God, as dear children.” Philip ii. 15. “That ye may be blameless and sincere, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst “of a crooked and perverse nation.” 1 John iii. 10. “In this the children of God are manifest, and “the children of the devil; whosoever doth not “righteousness is not of God.” There have been great enquiries concerning the marks of a child of God; this is the true character, and that which in effect comprehends all others, our imitation and resemblance of God in those perfections, wherein he is set forth for a pattern to us. And in this mainly consists the practice both of natural religion, and of true Christianity.

But does not religion consist very much in the duties of God’s worship, in the exercise of piety and devotion, in constant and frequent prayers to God, and in the celebration of his goodness by praise and thanksgiving, in reading and hearing, and meditating upon God’s word, in fasting and abstinence, and keeping our bodies in subjection to our spirits, and in frequent receiving of the holy sacrament? to this I answer, that religion doth consist very much in the due performance of these duties, and they are unquestionable and necessary parts of religion, and the

the means appointed by God for the begetting and increasing in us such dispositions of mind, as render us most like to God, and for the production of all the fruits of goodness and holiness and righteousness in our lives.

But then it is to be considered, that these exercises of piety and devotion are but the means of religion, and not the ultimate end and design of it. All these do but serve to bring us to a nearer resemblance of God; and where they fail of this end, and are performed for their own sakes only, and we rest in them, without aiming at any thing farther, they lose their nature; because they are not used as means, but rested in, as if they were the end of religion. And it is to be feared there are many which fall into this fatal mistake about religion, and think that if they do but serve God in their families, and go to church, and behave themselves there with devotion and reverence, and at certain seasons receive the sacrament, they are truly religious, and very good Christians; when all this while they take no care to improve themselves in real goodness, by an inward conformity of their minds to God, and the real reformation and amendment of their lives, by mortifying their lusts, and subduing their appetites and passions to the laws of reason and religion, by “putting on, as the elect of God, bowels of kindness;” by being true and faithful, righteous and just, patient and merciful, “as their Father which is in heaven is” so; and by “forbearing one another” in case of provocation, and “forgiving one another, even as God for CHRIST’s sake hath forgiven us; by purifying themselves as God is pure,” and endeavouring to “be holy in all manner of conversation, as he who hath called
“ them

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“them is holy;” when all this while they are as covetous, and earthly-minded, and, to serve their covetousness, will strain a point of truth or justice, and hardly do an act of charity in their whole lives, but what is extorted from them by mere importunity, or some such urgent necessity, in point of decency and reputation, that for shame of the world they know not how to avoid it; when their passions are as fierce and ungoverned, their hearts as full of gall and bitterness, their tongues of slander and evil-speaking, their humours as proud, and surly, and censorious, as theirs can be who are openly profane, and seem to neglect and despise all religion: and yet because they serve God (as they call it) and make an external appearance of piety and devotion, are good church-men, and attend upon the ordinances of God, they think they have discharged the whole business of religion admirably well, and are very good children of God, and in a state of great grace and favour with him. Whereas the performance of all these duties, and the use of all these means separated from that which is the great end of religion, the conformity of our selves to God, in those qualities and dispositions which I have mentioned, is so far from finding acceptance with God, that it is an abomination to him. So God every where declares in scripture, telling us, that “the prayer of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,” and that he disdains to be praised by men of unhallowed lips and lives; and that unless with “the praises we offer to him, we order our conversation aright, we shall not see the salvation of God.” With what contempt does he speak of this formal and external religion, without the power of it upon our hearts and lives! “To what purpose is the multitude of
“ your

“ your sacrifices to me? Will the LORD be pleased
“ with thousands of rams, and ten thousands of
“ rivers of oil? He hath shewed thee, O man,
“ what is good; and what doth the LORD require
“ of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and
“ to walk humbly with thy God? Is not this the
“ fast which I have chosen, to break the bands of
“ wickedness, and to let the oppressed go free; to
“ deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring
“ the poor, that are cast out, to thine house; when
“ thou seest the naked, that thou cover him, and
“ that thou hide not thy self from thine own flesh.”

Nor is it hearing of the word that will avail us, unless we be doers of it. “ Blessed are they (says
“ our SAVIOUR) that hear the word of God, and
“ keep it. He that heareth these sayings of mine,
“ and doth them, shall be likened to a wise man,
“ who hath built his house upon a rock.” Nor will
bare receiving the sacrament recommend us to
God; but performing the obligation, which there-
by we take upon our selves, to abstain from all sin
and wickedness; otherwise “ we tread under foot
“ the son of God, and prophane the blood of the
“ covenant, whereby we should be sanctified, as if
“ it were an unholy thing.” Can any man think
that to be religion, which has no effect upon the
lives of men, which does not teach them to govern
their words and actions, who reads those plain words
of St. James? “ If any man among you seem to be
“ religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but de-
“ ceiveth his own heart, that man's religion is vain.
“ Pure religion and undefiled before God and the
“ Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows
“ in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted
“ from the world.” When religion produceth

these

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these real effects, then the means of religion do truly serve the end of it, and we are not only "hearers of the word, but doers of it," and "shall be blessed in our deed."

So that as there is an obligation upon us to use the means of religion, which God hath instituted, with great care and conscience; so we should chiefly mind that, which is the end of all religion, which is to make us partakers of a divine nature, and make us like to God, especially in those amiable and excellent qualities, which are the glory and beauty of the divine nature, his benignity and goodness, his mercy and patience. These, because they are the primary perfections of God, are the principal duties both of natural and revealed religion, and of an eternal and indispensable obligation; because they have their foundation in the nature of God, which is fixt and unalterable. And all positive institutions, when they come in competition with these, are to stoop and vail to them. Natural and moral duties, especially those of goodness, and mercy, and charity, are so strongly bound upon us, that nothing in any revealed religion can cancel the obligation of them, or justify the violation of these great and indispensable laws. Our SAVIOUR in his religion has declared nothing to the prejudice of them: but, on the contrary, has straitned our obligation to them, as much as is possible: "The son of man came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them;" so that they "know not what manner of spirit they are of," who think to please God by hating men, who are made after the image of God, and "by killing one another, to do him good service;" who, to advance his cause and religion in the world, will break through all the obligations of nature and civil society,

ty, undermine government, and disturb the peace of mankind. S E R M.
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Whereas our SAVIOUR did not by any thing in his religion design to alter the civil government of the world, or to lessen and diminish the rights of princes, or to set men loose from allegiance to them, or to make treason and rebellion, bloody wars and barbarous massacres lawful, for the propagating of his faith. He had (as one would imagine) as much power as the pope; but yet he deposed no princes, nor excommunicated and discharged their subjects from their fidelity and obedience to them, for their opposition to his religion; he hath assumed no such power to himself. "By what authority" then doth his vicar do these things? and who "gave him this authority?" Our LORD tells us plainly, "his kingdom was not of this world;" and that without any distinction of *in ordine ad spiritualia*, and therefore he wrested no prince's kingdom out of his hands, nor seized it as forfeited to himself.

But this power the pope claims to himself, and hath exercised it many a time, disturbing the peace of nations, and exercising the most barbarous cruelties in the world, under a pretence of zeal for God and religion: as if because religion is so very good a thing in itself, it would warrant men to do the very worst things for it's sake; which is the ready way to render religion contemptible and odious, and to make two of the best things in the world, God and religion, good for nothing.

If we would preserve in the minds of men any reverence and esteem for religion, we must take heed how we destroy the principles of natural religion, and undermine the peace and happiness of human

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fociety, for the glory of God, and under pretence of following divine revelation, and being led by a church that cannot err: for every church doth certainly err, that teacheth any thing plainly contrary to the principles and dictates of natural religion, and utterly inconsistent with the essential perfections of God, and with the peace and order of the world: for "God is not the God of confusion, but of order;" which St. Paul appealeth to, as a principle of eternal truth, and naturally known: but they that pretend that religion prompts men to sedition and cruelty, do represent God as the God of confusion, and not of order.

Therefore whatever men may through an ignorant zeal, or for ambitious ends, pretend to be religion; let us place it in that which is unquestionable, the imitation of the divine perfections, and let us (as the apostle exhorts) "put on, as the elect of God, bowels of mercy, kindness, meekness, long-suffering, and above all, let us put on charity, which is the very bond of perfection." The great perfection of the divine nature, or rather the very essence of God is love. So St. John speaks, "God is love, and he that dwelleth in love, dwelleth in God, and God in him." And it is very remarkable that in these very qualities of charity, and kindness, and compassion, which we peculiarly call humanity, we approach nearest to the divinity it self, and that the contrary dispositions do transform us into wild beasts and devils.

And yet as severely as I speak against these principles and practices, I have an hearty pity and compassion for those who are under the power of so great a delusion, and upon a pretence of being made the only true Christians in the world, are seduced from

from humanity it self, and so far from being made good Christians by these principles, that they are hardly left to be men ; “ being blinded, and led by “ the blind, they fall into the ditch” of the grossest and foulest immoralities ; such as are plainly enough condemned by the light of nature, if there were no bible in the world.

Not but that we protestants have our faults and our follies too, and those (God knows) too many and too visible ; we possess more truth, but there is little peace among us ; and yet God is as well and as often in scripture called “ the God of peace,” as “ the “ God of truth.” In this great light and liberty of the reformed religion, we are apt to be wanton, and to quarrel and fall out ; we are full of heats and animosities, of schisms and divisions, “ and the “ way of peace we have not known.” God grant that at last “ in this our day” (when it concerns us so much) we may “ know the things that belong “ to our peace, before they be hid from our eyes.”

You see in what things the practice of religion mainly consists, in our likeness to God, and resemblance of him in holiness and goodness ; and without this we are utterly incapable of happiness : we cannot see God, unless we be like him. The presence of God can administer no pleasure, no felicity to us, till we be changed into his image ; till we come to this temper, to hate sin, and delight in purity and holiness, we can have no delightful communion with the holy God ; till our passions be subdued, and our souls dispossessed of those devilish and ungodlike qualities of hatred and malice, of revenge and impatience, and till we be endued with the spirit of universal goodness and charity, we are not fit company for our heavenly Father ; we are not qualified

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to dwell with God, who is love and dwells in love. So far as we are defective in these divine qualities and perfections, so far we fall short of the temper of happiness.

There is a direct and eternal opposition between the holy and good God, and the evil dispositions of wicked men, and till this opposition be removed, it is impossible we should find any felicity in the enjoyment of God. Now the nature of God is fixt and unchangeable, God cannot recede from his own perfection, and therefore we must quit our sin: thou canst not change God, therefore change thy self, and rather think of putting off thy corrupt nature, which may be changed, than of altering the divine nature, “with whom is no variableness nor “shadow of turning.” God condescended to take our nature upon him, to make us capable of happiness; but if this will not do, he will not put off his own nature to make us happy.

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*The happiness of God.*I TIM. i. 11. *The blessed God—*

The whole verse runs thus,

*According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God,
which was committed to my trust.*

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SINCE all men naturally desire happiness, and thirst after it; methinks we should all desire to know what it is, and where it is to be found, and how

how it is to be attained by us, in that degree in which creatures are capable of it. What Job says of wisdom, may be said also of happiness, "God understandeth the way thereof, and he knoweth the place thereof." He only, who is perfectly possessed of it himself, knows wherein it consists, and what are the true ingredients of it.

So that to direct us in our search after happiness, the best way will be to contemplate and consider the divine nature, which is the perfect pattern and idea of happiness, the original spring and fountain of all the felicity that creatures are capable of. And to that end, I have pitched upon these words, wherein the apostle attributes this perfection of blessedness or happiness to God, "The blessed God."

And though this be as essential a part as any other of that Notion which mankind have of God from the light of nature, yet I nowhere find in all the new testament, this attribute of happiness given to God, but only twice in this epistle. 'Tis true indeed, the title of blessedness is frequently given both to God and CHRIST, but in another sense, and in a quite different notion: as Mark xiv. 61. where the high-priest asks our SAVIOUR, "Art thou the CHRIST, the Son of the blessed, τῷ εὐλογητῷ, of him that is celebrated and praised;" and 2 Cor. xi. 31. "The God and Father of our LORD JESUS CHRIST, who is blessed for evermore." So likewise, Rom. i. 25. "The Creator blessed for evermore:" Which likewise is said of CHRIST, Rom. ix. 5. "Of whom CHRIST came, who is over all, God blessed for evermore; that is, for ever to be praised and celebrated." But in all these texts the Greek word is εὐλογητός, which though we translate blessed, yet it is a quite different notion from the

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the title of blessedness which is given to GOD in the text, where the word is not εὐλογητός, but μακάριος, “the blessed, or happy God;” and this title is not any where in all the new testament, (that I know of) given to GOD, but here in the text, and Chap. vi. v. 15. where our LORD JESUS CHRIST (who also is GOD) is called “the blessed and the only potentate.” And whether this title of “the blessed, or the happy God,” be here in the text given to GOD the Father, or to his eternal Son, our LORD JESUS CHRIST; is not so much material to my present purpose to enquire. For, suppose it be CHRIST who is here called “the blessed God;” this however is certain, that blessedness or happiness is a title belonging to GOD, which is all that is necessary for a foundation of my present discourse.

In speaking of this argument, I shall do these three things.

I. Shew what we are to understand by the happiness of GOD, and what are the essential ingredients of it.

II. That this title doth belong to GOD, and that the divine nature is perfectly blessed and happy.

III. How far creatures are capable of happiness, and by what ways and means they may be made partakers of it: and shall then make some inferences from my discourse upon this argument.

I. I will consider what we are to understand by the blessedness or happiness of GOD, and what are the essential ingredients of it. Now the notion of happiness taken at it's highest pitch (as we must necessarily do when we apply it to GOD) is no other than a fixt and immoveable state of contentment and satisfaction, of pleasure and delight, resulting from the secure possession, and enjoyment of all that is good and

and desirable, that is, of all excellency and perfection; so that these following ingredients must go to make up a perfect state of happiness.

1. Perfect knowledge, to understand what it is that constitutes happiness, and to know when one is really possess of it. For as he is not happy, who is so only in imagination or a dream, without any real foundation in the thing; for he may be pleased with his condition, and yet be far enough from being truly happy: So on the other hand, he that has all other necessary ingredients of happiness, and only wants this, that he doth not think himself so, cannot be happy. For this we often see in the imperfect felicity of this world, that many men who have all the materials and circumstances of a worldly happiness about them, yet by the unskilful management of the matter, and from a lightness and injudiciousness of mind, not knowing when they are well, they make an hard shift, even when they are in as good circumstances as it is almost possible for men to be in this world, to be very discontented and miserable in their own opinions. But God perfectly knows both what makes happiness, and that he is possess of it.

2. To perfect happiness is likewise required a full power to do whatever conduceth to happiness, and likewise to check and controul whatever would be an hindrance and disturbance to it; and therefore no being is as happy as it can be, that is not all-sufficient, and hath not within it's power and reach whatever is necessary to an happy condition, and necessary to secure and continue that happiness against all attempts and accidents whatsoever.

3. There is wisdom also required to direct this power, and manage it in such a manner, as it may effectually conduce to this end; and this is very different

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ferent from mere power, abstractedly considered; for one may have all the materials of happiness, and yet want the wisdom and skill to put them so together, as to frame an happy condition out of them; and he is not happy, who doth not thoroughly understand the proper method and means of compassing and securing his own happiness.

4. Another most considerable and essential ingredient of happiness is goodness; without which, as there can be no true majesty and greatness, so neither can there be any felicity or happiness. Now goodness is a generous disposition of mind to communicate and diffuse itself, by making others partakers of it's happiness in such degrees as they are capable of it, and as wisdom shall direct: For he is not so happy as he may be, who hath not the pleasure of making others so, and of seeing them put into an happy condition by his means, which is the highest pleasure (I had almost said pride, but I may truly say glory) of a good and great mind: For by such communications of himself, an immense and all-sufficient being doth not lessen himself, or put any thing out of his power, but doth rather enlarge and magnify himself; and does, as I may say, give great ease and delight to a full and fruitful being, without the least diminution of his power and happiness. For the cause and original of all other beings can make nothing so independent upon itself, as not still to maintain his interest in it, to have it always under his power and government; and no being can rebel against his maker, without extreme hazard to himself.

5. Perfect happiness doth imply the exercise of all other virtues, which are suitable to so perfect a being, upon all proper and fitting occasions; that is, that so perfect a being do nothing that is contrary

trary to, or unbecoming his holiness and righteousness, his truth and faithfulness, which are essential to a perfect being; and for such a being to act contrary to them in any case, would be to create disquiet and disturbance to itself: For this is a certain rule, and never fails, that nothing can act contrary to its own nature without reluctance and displeasure, which in moral agents is that which we call guilt: for guilt is nothing else but the trouble and disquiet which ariseth in one's mind, from the consciousness of having done something which is contrary to the perfective principles of his being, that is, something that doth not become him, and which, being what he is, he ought not to have done; which we cannot imagine ever to befall so perfect and immutable a being as God is.

6. Perfect happiness implies in it the settled and secure possession of all those excellencies and perfections; for if any of these were liable to fail, or be diminished, so much would be taken off from perfect and complete happiness. If the Deity were subject to any change or impairment of his condition, so that either his knowledge, or power, or wisdom, or goodness, or any other perfection, could any ways decline or fall off, there would be a proportionable abatement of happiness. And from all these does result in the

7th and last place, Infinite contentment and satisfaction, pleasure and delight, which is the very essence of happiness.

1. Infinite contentment and satisfaction in this condition. And well may happiness be contented with itself; that is, with such a condition, that he that is possess of it, can neither desire it should be better, nor have any cause to fear it should be worse.

2. Pleasure and delight, which is something more than contentment: for one may be contented with an affliction, and painful condition, in which he is far from taking any pleasure and delight. “No affliction is joyous for the present, but grievous,” as the apostle speaks Heb. xii. But there cannot be perfect happiness without pleasure in our condition. Full pleasure is a certain mixture of love and joy, hard to be exprest in words, but certainly known by inward sense and experience.

And thus I have endeavoured to describe to you, as well as I could, according to our imperfect conceptions and expressions of God, the happiness of the divine nature, and wherein it consists. I proceed to the

II. Thing I proposed, which was to shew, that this attribute of perfection doth belong to God; and that the divine nature is perfectly blessed and happy; and this is so universal an acknowledgment of natural light, that it would be a very superfluous and impertinent work, to trouble you with particular citations of heathen authors to this purpose; nothing being more frequent in them than to call the Deity, *beatissimam & perfectissimam naturam*, “the most happy and most perfect being,” and therefore happy, because felicity doth naturally result from perfection. It shall suffice to take notice of these two things out of heathen writers, to my present purpose.

1. That they accounted happiness so essential to the notion of a God, that this was one of the ways which they took to find out what properties were fit to attribute to God, and what not; to consider, what things are consistent with happiness, or inconsistent with it; and whatever did signify happiness, and was a perfection consistent with it, they ascribed to God,

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God, as a suitable property of the divine nature; and whatever was otherwise, they removed it from God, as unfit to be said of him.

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2. Whatever differences there were among the philosophers concerning the perfections of the divine nature, they all agreed in the perfect felicity of it; even Epicurus himself, who so boldly attempted to strip the divine nature of most of it's perfections, by denying that God either made or governed the world; whereby he took away at once his being the first cause and original of all things, and his goodness likewise, and wisdom, and power, and justice; or at least made all these useless, by taking away all occasion and opportunity for the exercise of them; yet this man does frequently own, and profess to believe the happiness of the divine nature; and then out of an ignorant and officious kindness to the Deity, and (as he pretended) for the security of his felicity, did, in effect, take away his other perfections; he would by no means put God to the trouble and burden of making the world, or taking care of the affairs of it, lest this should discompose the Deity, or be an interruption or disturbance of his ease and felicity. For thus Lucretius, the great disciple of Epicurus, describes his opinion of the divine nature:

*Omnis enim divum, per se, natura necesse est,
Immortali ævo summâ cum pace fruatur,
Semota à nostris rebus, sejunctaque longè.
Nam privata dolore omni, privata periclis,
Ipsa suis pollens opibus, nihil indiga nostri,
Nec bene promeritis capitur, nec tangitur ira.*

That is, "It is necessary that the divine nature
" should be happy, and therefore altogether un-
" concerned in our affairs; free from all grief and

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“ danger, sufficient for itself, and standing in need of no body, neither pleased with our good actions, nor provoked by our faults.” This was a very false notion both of God and happiness, to imagine that the care of the world should be a pain and disturbance to infinite knowledge, and power, and goodness. But this is not now my business to consider; that which is to my present purpose, is, that the happiness of the divine nature was universally owned; and that blessedness is so inseparable from the notion of a Deity, that whoever professes to believe a God, must acknowledge him to be perfectly happy.

As for the testimony of scripture, I have already told you, that there are but two texts wherein this title of μακάριος, the happy or blessed, is given to God; but by consequence the scripture every where declares the happiness of the divine nature, viz. wherever it speaks of the excellency and perfection of his being, of his knowledge, and power, and wisdom, and goodness, and righteousness, and of the eternity and unchangeableness of these, and of the infinite delight and complacency which he takes in the enjoyment of these perfections. I shall now proceed to the

III. And last thing which I proposed to consider, viz. How far creatures are capable of happiness, and by what ways and means they may be made partakers of it. They are not capable of absolute and perfect happiness, because that results from infinite perfection, which is no where to be found but in God: it remains then, that creatures are only capable of being happy in a finite and limited degree, by the resemblance of God, and by the enjoyment of him; by being like to him, and by our likeness

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to him, being qualified for his favour, and for the enjoyment of him.

As we are creatures of a finite power, and limited understandings, and a mutable nature, we do necessarily want many of those perfections, which are the cause and ingredients of a perfect happiness. We are far from being sufficient for our own happiness; we are neither so of our selves, nor can we make our selves so by our own power; for neither are we wise enough for our own direction, nor good enough for our own satisfaction. All the happiness that we are capable of is, by communication from him, who is the original and fountain of it; by our being made "partakers of the divine nature," (as St. Peter speaks) by our resemblance of God in those perfections which are the most essential ingredients of happiness, his goodness, and righteousness, and truth, and holiness; these do immediately qualify us for the favour and friendship of Almighty God, and for the blessed sight and enjoyment of him; and the favour of God, and the light of his countenance lifted up upon us, and his friendship and good-will to us, supplies all the defects of power and wisdom in us: for God being our friend, we have an interest in all his perfections, and a security, that, as occasion requires, they will all be employed for our benefit and advantage; so that though we are "weak in our selves," we are "strong in the LORD, and in the power of his might," and are "able to do all things through him strengthening us;" and though "we want wisdom," we may have free recourse to the fountain of it, and "ask of God, who gives to all liberally, and upbraideth not." And it is next to having these perfections in our selves, to know where to have them for asking,

asking, whenever we stand in need of them, so far as is necessary to our happiness.

So that though our happiness depend upon another, yet if we be careful to qualify our selves for it, (and God is always ready to assist us by his grace to this purpose) it is really and in effect in our own power; and we are every whit as safe and happy in God's care and protection of us, as if we were sufficient for our selves. However, this is the highest happiness that the condition of a creature is capable of, to have all our defects supplied in so liberal a manner by the bounty of another, and to have a free recourse to the fountain of happiness, and at last to be admitted to the blessed sight and enjoyment of him, "in whose presence is fulness of joy, and at whose right hand are pleasures for evermore." I have done with the three things I proposed to speak to.

But to what purpose, may some say, is this long description and discourse of happiness? How are we the wiser and the better for it? I answer; very much, in several respects.

I. This plainly shews us, that atheism is a very melancholy and mischievous thing; it would take away the fountain of happiness, and the only perfect pattern of it; it endeavours at once to extinguish the being of God, and all the life and comfort of mankind, so that we could neither form any idea of happiness, or be in any possibility of attaining it. For it is plain, we are not sufficient for it of our selves; and if there be not a God, there is nothing that can make us so. God is "the true light of the world," and a thousand times more necessary to the comfort and happiness of mankind, than the sun itself, which is but a dark shadow of that infinitely more

more bright and glorious being; "the happy and only potentate" (as the apostle describes him in the latter end of this epistle) "who only hath immortality, dwelling in that light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor can see," meaning in this mortal state.

So that the greatest enemies, and most injurious of all others to mankind, are those who would banish the belief of a God out of the world; because this is "to lay the ax to the root of the tree," and at one blow to cut off all hopes of happiness from mankind. So that he is a fool indeed, that "says in his heart, there is no God;" that is, that wisheth there were none; because it is not possible for a man to wish worse to himself, and more effectually to destroy his own happiness.

2. If the divine nature be so infinitely and completely happy, this is a very great confirmation of our faith and hope concerning the happiness of another life, which the scripture describes to us, by the sight and enjoyment of God. As we are creatures, we are not capable of the happiness that is absolutely and infinitely perfect, because our nature is but finite, and limited; but the blessed God, who is infinitely happy himself, can also make us happy according to our finite measure and capacity. For, as he that is the first and original being, can communicate being to other things; so he that is the fountain of happiness, can derive and convey happiness to his creatures.

And we shall the more easily believe this, when we consider that goodness, as it is the prime perfection, so it is likewise the chief felicity of the divine nature. It is his glory and delight to communicate himself, and shed abroad his goodness; and the highest

est expression of the divine goodness, is to communicate happiness to his creatures, and to be willing that they should share and partake with him in it. Base and envious natures are narrow and contracted, and love to confine their enjoyments and good things to themselves, and are loth that others should take part with them; but the most noble and most generous minds are most free and enlarged, and cannot be happy themselves, unless they find or make others so.

This is the highest pitch of goodness, and consequently the highest contentment, and the supreme delight of the divine nature. Now it is natural to every being, to be most frequent and abundant in those acts in which it finds the greatest pleasures; to be good, and to do good, is the supreme felicity of God himself; therefore we may easily believe, that he is very ready and forward to make us happy, by all the ways that are agreeable to his wisdom and righteousness; and that he is also willing to make us abundantly so, and to advance us to the highest degree of felicity, of which our nature is capable, if we do not render our selves incapable of such a blessing, by an obstinate refusal of it, and utter indisposition for it.

This, I say, is very credible, because the happiness of God himself consists in that propension and disposition of nature, which tends to make others happy. And if there can be any accession to that which is infinite, God himself finds a new pleasure and felicity in the communication of his goodness to his creatures; and therefore is represented in scripture, as glad of "the conversion of a sinner," because the sinner hereby becomes capable of the happiness which God designed for his creatures, and is always ready to confer upon them, whenever they

they are qualified for it, and he can, with the honour of his own perfections, bestow it upon them.

There are two things which raise our hopes and expectation of good from any person; if he be able and willing to bestow upon us what we hope for from him. Now if any one can confer happiness upon us, it is he who is infinitely possessed of it, and hath all the treasures of it in himself, and that God only is, who, as he is able so is willing to make us happy, if we be qualified for it; and it is no impairing of his happiness to make others happy; for even that goodness, which inclines him to communicate happiness to others, is a great part of his own felicity; so that, as our SAVIOUR argues, "because I live, you shall live also," we may reason in like manner, that "because God is happy, we shall be happy also," if we do but sincerely desire and endeavour to qualify our selves for it. The goodness of God does strongly incline him to desire our happiness, and makes him willing and ready to bestow it upon us, whenever we are capable to receive it.

So that the goodness of God is the great foundation of all our hopes, and the firmest ground of our assurance of a blessed immortality. It is the happiness of the divine nature to communicate himself; and the communications of God's goodness to us are the cause of our happiness; and therefore, both for our example and encouragement, the goodness of God ought always to be represented to the greatest advantage, and we should endeavour to possess our minds with a firm belief and persuasion of it, and to remove from the divine nature (which we all acknowledge to have infinitely more goodness than is to be found in any of the sons of men) whatever we would not attribute to a good man, and to vin-

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dicare God from all suspicion of envy and ill-will, of cruelty and arbitrary dealing with his creatures. And I cannot apprehend why men should be averse from these so agreeable and delightful apprehensions of God; or how it should be any man's interest to lessen the goodness of God; for most certainly the better God is in himself, the better and happier it will be for us all, if it be not our own fault.

3. From what hath been said concerning the happiness of the divine nature, we may learn wherein our happiness must consist, namely, in the image, and in the favour of God; in the favour of God as the cause of our happiness; and in the image of God, as a necessary inward disposition and qualification for it. Unless God love us, we cannot be happy, for miserable are they whom he hates; for God to say of any man, that "his soul hath no pleasure in him," imports as great misery, and as dreadful a curse as can be imagined, and his soul can have no pleasure in a bad man; for "he loveth righteousness and hateth iniquity, he is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him; the wicked shall not stand in his sight; he hateth all the workers of iniquity." Nay, if we could suppose that he could love and take pleasure in any person that is unlike to him (which is impossible) yet that person could not be happy, because he would want that inward frame and disposition of mind, which is necessary to happiness. For the very same causes and ingredients which make up the happiness of God, must in an inferior degree be found in us, otherwise we cannot be happy; no, though a man were in heaven, if he be still a bad man, *cælum non animum mutat*, he hath only changed the climate, and is gone into another

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another country, but he bears himself still about him, and his mind is not changed, which would signify a thousand times more to his happiness, than any place or outward circumstance whatsoever. A bad man, wheresoever he goes, hath a root of gall and bitterness within him, and is miserable from himself; he hath a fiend in his own breast, and the fuel of hell in a guilty conscience.

For there is a certain temper and disposition of mind, that is necessary and essential to happiness, and that is holiness and goodness, which is the nature of God; and so much as any person departs from this temper, so far he removes himself, and runs away from happiness: and as sin is a departure from God, so the punishment of it is likewise expressed by departing from him; "depart from me ye
"cursed; depart from me all ye that work iniquity, I know you not."

And this is one great part of the misery of those degenerate and accursed spirits, the devils, who are for ever banished from the presence of God, that they are of a temper quite contrary to God, wicked and impure, envious and malicious, mischievous and cruel; and such a temper is naturally a torment and disquiet to itself. And here the foundation of hell is laid in the evil disposition of our minds; and till this be cured, and set right, it is as impossible for any of us to be happy, as it is for a limb that is out of joint to be at ease. And the external presence of God, and a local heaven (if we could imagine such a person to be admitted into it, and see all the glories of that place, and the pleasures and delights of that state) all this, I say, would signify no more to make a bad man happy, than heaps of gold and diamonds, and consorts of the most delicious music,

sick, and a well-spread table, and a rich and costly bed would contribute to a man's ease in the paroxysm of a fever, or in a violent fit of the stone; because the man hath that within which torments him, and until that be removed, he cannot possibly be at ease. The man's spirits are out of order, and off the hinges, and tost from it's center, and till they be set right, and restored to their proper place and state by goodness and holiness, the man will be perpetually restless, and cannot possibly have any ease or peace in his mind: for how can there be peace, how can there be happiness to him, who is of a temper directly opposite to it? "The wicked," saith the prophet, Isa. lvii. 20, 21. "is like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt." So long as there is impurity in our hearts, and guilt upon our consciences, they will be restlessly working; "there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." The Hebrew word which we translate peace, signifies all kind of happiness; there can be no felicity to a bad man. The consideration whereof should put us upon the most serious and earnest endeavours to be like God, that we may be capable of his favour, and partakers of his felicity. The divine nature is the only perfect idea of happiness, and nothing but our conformity to it can make us happy.

I have been so long upon this argument, on purpose to convince men of the necessity of holiness and goodness, and all other virtues, to our present and future happiness. They understand not the nature of happiness, who hope for it, or imagine they can attain it in any other way. The author and the fountain of happiness, he that made us, and alone can make us happy, cannot make us so in any other way, than by planting in us such a disposition of mind,

mind, as is in truth a participation of the divine nature, and by endowing us with such qualities as are the necessary materials and ingredients of happiness. There is no way to partake of the felicity of God blessed for ever, but by becoming holy and righteous, good and merciful as he is.

All men naturally desire happiness, and seek after it, and are as they think travelling towards it, but generally they mistake their way. Many are eager in the pursuit of the things of this world, and greedily catch at pleasures and riches and honour, as if these could make them happy; but when they come to embrace them, they find that they are but clouds and shadows, and that there is no real and substantial felicity in them. "Many say, who will shew us any good?" Meaning the good things of this world, corn, and wine, and oil: but wouldst thou be happy indeed? Endeavour to be like the pattern of happiness, and the fountain of it; address thy self to him in the prayer of the psalmist, "LORD, lift thou up upon me the light of thy countenance, and thou shalt put more joy and gladness into my heart," than the men of the world can have, when their corn and their wine increaseth.

Many say, lo here, and lo there! That happiness is in a great place, or in a plentiful estate, or in the enjoyment of sensual pleasures and delights; but believe them not: happiness is something that is nearer and more intimate to us, than any of the things of this world; it is within thee, in thine heart, and in the very inward frame and disposition of thy mind.

In a word, if ever we would be happy, we must be like the blessed God, we must be holy, and merciful, and good, and just, as he is, and then we are secure of his favour; for "the righteous LORD loveth

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“eth righteousness, and his countenance will be-
hold the upright.” Then we shall be qualified for
the enjoyment of him, and take pleasure in commu-
nion with him, because we shall be like him. For
the surest foundation of love and friendship is a simi-
litude of temper and disposition; every thing natu-
rally affects it’s own likeness, and moves towards it,
and greedily catcheth at it; and gladly runs into the
embraces of it. God and man must be like one ano-
ther, before they can take pleasure in one another:
if we be unlike to God, it is in the nature of the thing
impossible that we should be happy in one another,
and therefore there must be a change either in God
or us, to bring about this likeness. The nature of
God is inflexible, fixt, and unchangeable; therefore
change thy self, sinner, and endeavour to be like
God; for since he cannot depart from his holiness,
and purity, thou must leave thy sins, and be holy as
he is holy, if ever thou hopest to be happy, as he
is: “every man that hath this hope in him,” must
“purify himself, even as he is pure.”

“Now to this happy and only Potentate, King of
“kings, and LORD of lords, who only hath im-
“mortality, and dwelleth in that light which no
“man can approach unto, whom no man hath
“seen, or can see; to him be honour, and pow-
“er everlasting. Amen.”

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The unchangeableness of God.

J A M E S i. 17.

With whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.

The whole period runs thus.

Do not err, my beloved brethren: Every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning.

THE connexion and dependance of these words upon the former is briefly this; the apostle had asserted before, that God is not the author of sin and evil, ver. 13, 14. "Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God, for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: but every man is tempted, when he is drawn aside of his own lust, and enticed;" and here in the text he asserts, that God is the fountain and author of all good;" do not err, my beloved brethren;" as if he had said, do not mistake me, though sin and evil be not from God, but from ourselves, and our own corrupt hearts; yet all good is from God, and not from ourselves: though we be the authors of the sins we commit, yet we are not so of the good that we do, that is from God;" every good gift, and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights." Sin, which is nothing but evil and imperfection, is not from God, but wholly from ourselves; whatever is good and perfect, is not from ourselves, but from

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from God; we are neither inclined to that which is good, nor are able of our selves to perform it; both the inclination and the power are from God, who is the fountain of goodness and perfection, and can never be otherwise, and can never change nor cease to be so, "for with him is no variableness, nor shadow of turning."

"Every good gift, and every perfect gift;" all that goodness, and all those degrees of perfection, which are in the creatures, in the highest angels or saints, in the best of the sons of men, whatever there is of excellency and perfection, of goodness or happiness in any of them, "is from above," that is from heaven, it is "the gift of God," and "com-
"eth down" from that perfect, good, and glorious being, whom the apostle here calls "the Father of lights," in allusion to the sun, which is a kind of universal benefactor to the world, and liberally dispenseth his light and heat and influence upon all things here below: but then there is this difference, the sun changeth it's habitudes and positions in reference to us, and varies it's shadows; it riseth and sets, comes nearer to us, and goes farther from us; but it is otherwise with this intellectual and immaterial sun, "the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness, nor shadow of turning," *παραλλαγή ἢ τροπῆς ἀποσκίασμα*, which are all astronomical words; the first, *παραλλαγή*, signifies the various habitudes and positions wherein the sun appears to us every day, at it's rising, in the meridian, and when it sets; *τροπή* is a word which belongs not to the daily, but to the yearly course of the sun, which is nearer to us, or farther from us, as he approacheth nearer towards the northern or southern tropicks; and hence it is that it casts several shadows to people in several countries;

ries; and agreeably to this, the word ἀποσκίασμα, “casting of shadows,” being joined with τροπή, signifies the variation of the shadows according to the course and motion of the sun.

But God is an eternal spring of light, which never rises or sets, which hath no mixture of shadow nor darkness, hath no changes nor variations, but is always the same free and liberal dispenser of good things to his creatures; “the Father of lights, with whom there is no variableness nor shadow of turning;” which words signify “the immutable perfection and goodness of the divine nature,” which shall (by God’s assistance) be the subject of my present discourse; in which I shall proceed in this method:

First, I shall briefly explain what is meant by the immutability, or unchangeableness, of the divine nature.

Secondly, I shall shew that this is a perfection essential to God, to be immutably what he is, that is good and perfect.

Thirdly, I shall answer an objection which lies against it, from the mention so often made in scripture of God’s repenting himself. And

Fourthly, apply the consideration of it to our selves.

I. For the explication of it. By the immutability of God, we mean, that he always is, and was, and to all eternity will be the same; that he undergoes no changes either of his essence and being, or of his properties and perfections. In reference to the unchangeableness of his being, he is said to be “eternal, incorruptible, and only to have immortality.” In reference to his perfections, he is always the same infinitely wise, and good, and powerful, and holy, and just being; from whence it follows,

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that he is constant and immutable in all his decrees and counsels, his purposes and promises. We are uncertain and mutable in our very nature and beings, and in all those qualities and perfections which belong to us, in all our purposes, resolutions, and actions; we are continually growing or decreasing in this or that quality, and do frequently change from one extreme to another, from that which is more perfect, to the contrary; now knowing, and then ignorant; sometimes wise, and oftner foolish, stronger and weaker, better or worse, as it happens, and as we order our selves, continually waxing or waining in our knowledge, and wisdom, and goodness, and power; we frequently change our minds, and alter our purposes, and break our promises, and contradict our firmest and most serious resolutions, and speak a thing and do it not, say it and do not bring it to pass; but God is everlastingly the same in all his perfections, constant to his intentions, steady to his purposes, immutably fixed and persevering in all his decrees and resolutions. I proceed to the

II. Thing I proposed, namely, to shew that this perfection is essential to God, to be unchangeably what he is. And this I shall endeavour to make manifest both from natural reason, and from the divine revelation of the holy scriptures.

I. From the dictates of natural reason, which tells us, that nothing argues greater weakness and imperfection than inconstancy and change. This is the great vanity of all creatures, that they are uncertain, and do not long continue in one state: this is the vanity of the world in general, that “the fashion of it passeth away;” and of man in particular, that he is liable to so many natural changes, by age, and diseases, and death; for which reason, he is said by

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the Psalmist, to be, "in his best estate, altogether
"vanity:" and that he is liable to so many moral
changes, to be deluded and deceived in his under-
standing, and to alter his opinion so often, to be
so fickle in his will, and to change so often his pur-
poses and resolutions, according to the alteration or
appearance of things. We attribute change and in-
constancy to persons of the weakest age and under-
standing; as children, who are liable "to be tost to
"and fro, and carried about with every wind," as
the apostle speaks, Eph. iv. 14.

Now if the divine nature were subject to change,
this would cast an universal cloud upon all the divine
perfections, and obscure all other excellencies, and
make them "like the flower of the field," which,
how gay and glorious soever, is fading and perish-
ing; and the greater the divine perfections are, the
greater imperfection would mutability be; for as
"the corruption of the best things is the worst," so
the better any thing is, so much the worse it would
be to have it liable to corruption and change.

And as mutability in God would darken all his
other perfections, so would it take away the founda-
tion and comfort of all religion; the ground of our
faith, and hope, and fear, of our love and esteem
of God, would be quite taken away. We could
have no great honour or esteem for a being that is
fickle and inconstant; if his power and justice were
uncertain, his threatnings would in a great measure
lose their awe and force; if his truth and faithfulness
could fail, no promises and declarations, how graci-
ous soever, would be any security or firm ground of
trust and confidence.

And this reasoning is not the result of divine re-
velation, but clearly founded in the natural notions

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and suggestions of our minds, as will appear by citing one or two testimonies to this purpose, of those who had no other guide but natural light. Plato, in his phædo, enquires, “ whether the most perfect “ (that is God) be always the same, or sometimes “ thus, and sometimes otherwise? that is, (saith “ he) whether that which is equality and goodness “ and bounty itself, receives any the least change “ at any time, and be not constant and uniform, “ and of itself always the same, *Καὶ ἑδαμῇ ἑδαμῶς* “ *ἀλλόωσιν ἑδεμίαν ἐνδέχεται*, and is never in any “ wise, upon any account, subject to any change “ or alteration whatsoever? To which he answers, “ That it is necessary that he should be the same “ and always alike.” And lib. 2. de Repub. where he lays down the fundamental laws and constitutions of religion, he mentions these two, (which one would almost think, he borrowed from St. James, but that he lived so long before him) viz. first, “ That God is the cause of all good, and in no wise “ of any evil:” answerably to what our apostle here asserts, that “ God cannot be tempted with “ evil, neither tempteth he any man; but that “ every good and perfect gift is from him.” Secondly, “ That God doth not deceive us, by making various representations of himself to us; “ sometimes in one form, and sometimes in another; for he is unchangeable, and always the same “ and cannot, *τῆς αὐτῆς ιδέας ἐκβαίνειν*, pass out “ of his own idea, or be any other than what he is:” which he further confirms by this excellent reasoning, “ that which is the best and most perfect being is not liable to any alteration; but such a being is God, and therefore he cannot be changed “ by any thing that is weaker and less perfect than “ him.

himself, and he cannot will to change himself; for if he should, it must either be for the better, or for the worse: it cannot be for the better; for being already possessor of all perfection, there can be no accession of any to him by any change; and certainly there is no worse being, as God is, that will change for the worse; and therefore he concludes, καλλίστος καὶ ἄριστος ὢν εἰς τὸ δύνασθαι μένει ἀεὶ ἀπλῶς καὶ τῇ αὐτῇ μορφῇ, "That being the goodliest and best being that is possible, he always continues simply the same." Seneca likewise, speaking of the immutability of God's counsels, (l. vi. de Benef.) *statuerunt* (says he) *quæ non mutarent, neque unquam primi consilii deos pœnitet*, "The gods make such unchangeable decrees, and never repent them of their first counsel."

2. This will yet more clearly appear from the divine revelation of the holy scriptures, which tell us, that God is unchangeable in his nature, and in his perfections, in all his decrees, and purposes, and promises: in his essence and being, Exod. iii. 14. "I am that I am;" this is his name, whereby he made known himself to the comfort of his people, and to the terror of the Egyptians their oppressors: Psal. xc. 2. "From everlasting to everlasting thou art God." Psal. cii. 27. "Thou art the same, and thy years fail not." Mal. iii. 6. "I am the LORD, and change not." Hence it is that the title of the living God is so frequently attributed to him; and he swears by this, as denoting not only his eternity, but his unchangeableness; "as I live, saith the LORD." Hither likewise we may refer those texts where he is called the "incorruptible God," Rom. i. 23. "The immortal King," 1 Tim. i. 17. and is said "only to have immortality,"

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“ty,” 1 Tim. i. 16. And he is immutable likewise in his perfections; hence it is so often said in the Psalms, that “his goodness and his mercy endure
“for ever; his righteousness is likewise said to en-
“dure for ever.” Psal. cxi. 3. and Psal. xxxvi. 6.
“To be like the great mountains, not only visible
“and conspicuous, but firm and immoveable;”
and the same likewise is said of his truth and faith-
fulness, Psal. cxvii. 2. “His truth endureth for
“ever;” and of his power, Esa. xxvi. 4. “In the
“LORD Jehovah is everlasting strength.”

And so likewise in his decrees and purposes, Psal. xxxiii. 11. “The counsel of the LORD standeth for
“ever, and the thoughts of his heart to all genera-
“tions;” Esa. xiv. 24. “Surely as I have thought,
“so shall it come to pass; and as I have purposed,
“so shall it stand.” Numb. xxiii. 19. “God is not
“a man that he should lie, or as the son of man,
“that he should repent: hath he spoken, and shall
“not he do it? hath he said it, and shall not he
“bring it to pass?” If he hath made any promise,
or entered into any covenant with us, it is firm and
immutable, Psal. lxxxix. 33. “He will not suffer
“his faithfulness to fail, his covenant will he not
“break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of his
“lips.” His covenant and his promise are in them-
selves immutable; but for our further assurance,
God hath given us his oath, the highest sign of im-
mutability; so the apostle to the Hebrews tells us,
chap. vi. 18. “That by two immutable things,”
(viz. his promise and his oath) “in which it is im-
“possible for God to lie, we might have strong
“consolation, who are fled for refuge to the hope
“which is set before us.” I proceed to the
III. Thing I promised, which is, to answer an
objection,

jection, which may seem to lie against what hath been said, from the mention so often made in scripture of God's repenting himself; as Gen. vi. 6. where it is said that "it repented God that he had made man." 1 Sam. xv. 11. That "he repented that he had made Saul king;" and 2 Sam. xxiv. 16. When "the angel had stretched out his hand over Jerusalem to destroy it," it is said, that "the LORD repented him of the evil." and Psal. cxxxv. 14. the LORD saith there, that "he will repent himself concerning his servants."

To all which I answer, that this expression of God's repentance we are to understand (as many others in scripture) after the manner of men, and as spoken by way of condescension and accommodation to our weakness and capacity, and not as casting any imputation of mutability and inconstancy upon God; as if out of levity, or for want of foresight, he did alter his mind: but when God is said "to repent that he made man, or that he made Saul king," the change was not in him, but in them; and it signifies, not that God was absolutely deceived in his expectation, but that things had fallen out contrary to all reasonable expectation; and therefore the scripture clothes God with the human passion of repenting and grieving for what he hath done, as men use to do when they are greatly disappointed and fall short of their expectation.

And as for the other instances, wherein God is said "to repent him of the evils threatned," the expression only signifies thus much, that God doth not execute that which seemed to us to have been his peremptory purpose and resolution; that is, he is pleased to do otherwise than his threatening seemed openly to express, because of some tacit condition implied

implied in it, which he did not think fit to acquaint us with. And this doth not at all derogate from the constancy and immutability of God: for when God did threaten, he spake what he did really purpose and intend, if something did not intervene to prevent the judgment threatned, upon which he was resolved at that time when he threatned, to be taken off, and to stay his hand: and in thus doing, God doth not *mutare consilium sed sententiam*; “he doth not change his inward counsel and purpose, but takes off the sentence,” which was past with reserved conditions, and unknown to us, on purpose to urge us the more effectually to repentance.

And that God usually reserves such conditions, not only in his threatnings, but sometimes also in his promises, appears from that remarkable text, Jer. xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10. “At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull down, and to destroy it; if that nation, against whom I have pronounced, turn from the evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them: at what instant I shall speak concerning a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant it; if it do evil in my sight, that it obey not my voice, then I will repent of the good wherewith I said I would benefit them.” And from this very consideration, the same prophet encourageth the people to repentance, Jer. xxvi. 13. “Therefore now amend your ways, and your doings, and obey the voice of the LORD your God, and the LORD will repent him of the evil he hath pronounced against you.” And we have a famous instance of this in the case of Nineveh, the destruction whereof within forty days after, God had openly proclaimed by his prophet

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prophet ; yet he stops the execution of the sentence, upon their repentance, Jonah iii. 10. " The men of Nineveh turned from their evil ways, and the LORD repented of the evil he said he would do unto them, and he did it not."

All that now remains, is to apply this doctrine of the immutability of the divine nature to our selves ; and the consideration of it may serve to several good purposes, both in reference to bad and good men.

First, in regard to sinners and wicked men.

And, 1st, The unchangeableness of GOD is matter of great terror to wicked men. Let but the sinner consider what GOD is, and the consideration of his unchangeable nature must needs terrify him : " He is a holy GOD, and of purer eyes than to behold iniquity," Hab. i. 12. He is not a GOD, that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him : the foolish shall not stand in his sight, he hateth all the workers of iniquity," Psal. v. 4, 5. He is likewise a just GOD, and will by no means clear the guilty, nor let sin go unpunisht," Exod. xxxiv. 7. He is also omnipotent, and is able to execute the vengeance threatned against sinners. " Who knoweth the power of thine anger?" Psal. xc. 11. " Thou even thou art to be feared ; and who may stand in thy sight when once thou art angry?" Psal. lxxvi. 7. " Strong is the LORD GOD who judgeth," Rev. xviii. 8. And, which gives a sad accent to all this, he that is thus holy, and just, and powerful, continues for ever the same, and will never alter or put off any of these properties, will never cease to hate iniquity, and to be an implacable enemy to all impenitent sinners : and is it not a " fearful thing to fall into the hands of" this holy, and just, and omnipotent " GOD who

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“lives for ever,” and can “punish for ever?” Let all obstinate sinners hear this, and tremble: you cannot be more obstinately bent to continue in your wicked ways, than God is peremptorily resolved to make you miserable. If you be determined upon a sinful course; God is also determined how he will deal with you, that “he will not spare”, but “that his “anger and jealousy shall make against you,” and that “all the curses that are written in his book shall “light upon you,” and that “he will blot out your “name from under heaven; he hath sworn in his “wrath, that” unbelieving and impenitent sinners “shall not enter into his rest:” and for the greater assurance of the thing, and that we may not think, that there is any condition implied in these threatenings, he hath confirmed them by an oath, that by this immutable sign, “in which it is impossible for “God to lie,” sinners might have strong terrors, and not be able to fly to any in hopes of refuge.

2dly, The consideration of God’s unchangeableness, should likewise be a very powerful argument to urge sinners to repentance. If they will but leave their sins, and turn to him, they will find him ready to receive them upon their repentance and submission; for “he is a God gracious and merciful, slow to “anger, and ready to forgive;” he is “unchangeably good,” and “his mercy endureth for ever:” but if they will not come in, and submit to these terms, there is nothing before them but ruin and destruction; nothing then “remains but a fearful looking for of judgment, and fiery indignation to consume them.” God hath declared to us the terms of our pardon and peace, and if we will not come up to them, he is at a point, he cannot change his nature, nor will he alter the terms of his covenant; there

there is a perfect and eternal opposition between the holy nature of God, and an impenitent sinner; and 'tis impossible such an one should be happy, till this opposition be removed; and to do that, there are but two ways imaginable, by changing God, or by changing our selves. The nature of God is fixed and unalterable; God cannot recede from his own pure nature; therefore we must depart from our sinful and corrupt nature. God cannot quit his holiness; therefore we must leave our sins: we can have no hope to change God, therefore we must change our selves. Rectify, sinner, thine own corrupt nature, and renounce thy lusts; do not venture upon impossibilities; rather think of altering thy sinful nature, which may be changed, than of altering the divine nature, which is essentially immutable, "with whom is no variableness, nor shadow of turning." God hath once condescended so far, as "to take our nature upon him," to make us capable of happiness: but if this will not do, he can go no lower, he will not, he cannot put off his own nature, to make us happy.

Secondly, in reference to good men, the consideration of God's unchangeableness is matter of great consolation to them; in all the changes and vicissitudes of the world; their main comfort and hope is built upon a rock, "the rock of ages," as the expression is in the prophet Isaiah, xxvi. 4. it relies upon the unchangeable goodness and faithfulness of God, "all whose promises are yea, and amen," truth and certainty. All other supports and hopes may fail us; but "God will not suffer his faithfulness to fail; his covenant will he not break, nor alter the thing which is gone out of his lips," as the psalmist assures us, Psal. lxxix. 33. Men may

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break their word, and be less than their promises ;
 but “ GOD is faithful, who hath promised to give
 “ grace and glory, and to with-hold no good thing
 “ from them that walk uprightly. He is not as
 “ man, that he should lie, or as the son of man,
 “ that he should repent. Hath he spoken, and
 “ shall he not do it? hath he said it, and shall not
 “ he bring it to pass ?

If there be any thing that hath the appearance of
 a change in GOD, it is usually on the merciful side ;
 as when he stops the execution of his threatnings,
 upon the repentance of a sinful nation ; as in that
 remarkable text which I mentioned before, Jer.
 xviii. 7, 8. “ At what instant I shall speak concern-
 “ ing a nation, and concerning a kingdom, to pluck
 “ up, and to pull down, and to destroy it ; if that
 “ nation against whom I have pronounced, turn
 “ from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I
 “ thought to do unto them :” and so likewise when
 his faithful people and servants are in great distress,
 and there is no visible help and means of relief ;
 in this case likewise GOD is said to repent and to ap-
 pear for their rescue. Deut. xxxii. 36. “ The LORD
 “ shall judge his people, and repent himself for his
 “ servants, when he seeth that their power is gone.”

Thus we should comfort our selves in the greatest
 extremities, with the consideration of the immutable
 goodness and faithfulness of GOD. The things of
 the world are mutable, and the men of the world ;
 even those things which seem most constant, as the
 heavens : and to be settled upon the surest foundati-
 ons, as the earth ; yet these shall be changed : Psal.
 cii. 25, 26, 27. “ Of old hast thou laid the founda-
 “ tions of the earth, and the heavens are the work
 “ of thy hands : they shall perish, but thou shalt

“ endure ; all of them shall wax old like a garment ;
“ as a vesture shalt thou change them, and they
“ shall be changed : but thou art the same, and thy
“ years shall have no end.” From whence the
psalmist infers this comfort to the church and peo-
ple of God, v. 28. “ The children of thy servants
“ shall continue, and their seed shall be establisht
“ before thee.”

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Nothing that is mutable can be a solid foundation
of comfort and confidence. Men are inconstant,
and riches are uncertain, and all other things which
men commonly trust to ; and therefore the apostle
“ chargeth them that are rich in this world, not to
“ trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God.”
He only that lives for ever is a firm foundation of
hope and confidence.

When God would comfort the Israelites in Egypt
under their great oppression, he bids Moses only to
declare to them his immutability, Exod. iii. 14. Say
unto them, “ I am that I am, hath sent me unto
“ you.” And this is the great comfort of Christi-
ans, that he who is their SAVIOUR, and their hope,
is “ the same yesterday, to day, and for ever : he
“ that was, and that is, and that is to come,” in
all durations the same.

We are continually changing, and are not the
same we were ; some of us were young, and now
are old ; once, perhaps, flourisht in great prosperi-
ty, but now are poor and needy ; were once strong
and healthful, but now sickly and weak : it should
comfort us in all these changes, that “ God is still
“ the same,” and he alone is instead of all other com-
forts and supports : when all other things fail, we
may “ rejoice in the LORD, and joy in the God of
“ our salvation.” Youth, and health, and riches,
and

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and friends may forsake us; but God hath promised, that "he will never leave us nor forsake us;" that "he will not leave us when we are old, nor forsake us when our strength faileth;" when "our strength fails," and "our heart fails," then is he "the strength of our hearts," and our "portion for ever;" and when our great change shall come, and the terrors of death shall take hold of us, we have still the same comfort, "the Lord liveth, and blessed be the God of our salvation."

In a word, the consideration of God's immutability should keep us fixed and unmoved in all the changes and accidents of this world, and not apt to be startled and surpris'd at them; according to that of the psalmist, "he shall not be afraid of evil tidings, because his heart is fixed, trusting in God." This should make us constant to him and his truth, "stedfast and unmoveable, and always abounding in the work of the Lord, for as much as we know, that our labour shall not be in vain in the Lord;" it should make us "hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering," in full assurance, that God "will be as good to us as his word," and in a firm hope and persuasion "of that eternal life, which God that cannot lie hath promised."

S E R-

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The knowledge of G O D.

I S A M. ii. 3.

The LORD is a God of knowledge.

I Come now to speak of those properties and per-
 fections which relate to the divine understanding,
 and will, and manner, and power of acting. Know-
 ledge considers things absolutely, and in themselves;
 wisdom considers the respects and relation of things
 one to another, and under the notion of means and
 ends. The knowledge of God is a perfect com-
 prehension of the nature of all things, with all their
 powers, and qualities, and circumstances; the wis-
 dom of God is a perfect comprehension of the re-
 spects and relation of things one to another; of
 their harmony and opposition; of their fitness and
 unfitness to such and such ends. The knowledge of
 God only implies his bare understanding of things;
 but his wisdom implies the skill of ordering and dis-
 posing things to the best ends and purposes, to make
 every thing, and to govern and administer all things
 in number, weight, and measure. I shall at pre-
 sent speak of the first of these, the knowledge of
 God; which, as I said, is a perfect comprehension
 of the nature of all things, and of every thing belong-
 ing to their nature: of the powers, and qualities,
 and circumstances of things.

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These words signify God to be the fountain of
 knowledge; that is, that he possesseth it himself,
 and communicates it to others. In the handling of
 this, I shall

First,

The knowledge of God.

First, endeavour to prove, that this attribute belongs to God.

Secondly, shew the perfection and the prerogatives of the divine knowledge.

Thirdly, draw some practical inferences from the whole.

First, for the proof of it, I shall attempt it two ways.

1. From the dictates of natural light and reason.
2. From scripture or divine revelation.

1. From the dictates of natural light and reason. I begin with this first ; because, unless this be established, all divine revelation falls to the ground ; unless natural reason assures us, that God is endowed with knowledge and understanding, it is in vain to enquire after divine revelation. For to make any revelation credible, two things are requisite on the part of the revealer, ability and integrity ; that he have a perfect knowledge and understanding of the thing which he reveals, so that he cannot be deceived himself ; and so much goodness and truth, that he will not deceive us. Now unless our reason assure us that God is endowed with knowledge and understanding, the first condition is evidently wanting, viz. ability, and consequently the second, integrity ; for there cannot be goodness and veracity without knowledge.

This being premised, I proceed to the proof of it from such arguments as our natural reason suggests to us. I have formerly told you, that the divine perfections are not to be proved by way of demonstration, but by way of conviction, by shewing the absurdities and inconveniencies of the contrary ; for if we deny knowledge to God, we must deny it to be a perfection ; we must deny it to be in any of the creatures ; we must attribute many other imperfections

fections to God ; all which are absurd to our natural reason ; for natural reason dictates to us, that knowledge is a perfection, that it is to be found in the creatures, and that the denial of it to God will argue many other imperfections in the divine nature ; now these are so many arguments which natural reason offers to us to prove, that “ knowledge belongs to God.”

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1. It is a perfection, and therefore belongs to God. Natural reason tells us, though the scripture had not said it, that “ knowledge excels ignorance as much as light doth darkness ;” now whatever is perfect and excellent is to be attributed to the divine nature ; for this is the first notion we have of God, that he is “ a being absolutely perfect.”

2. Knowledge is to be found in some of the creatures, and therefore is much more in God the creator, because it is derived from him. Our very understandings whereby we know God, or any thing else, are an argument that knowledge and understanding are in God. If “ he gives wisdom to the wise, and knowledge to them that know understanding,” if he communicates this perfection to the creatures, he himself is much more possessor of it. The scripture indeed useth this argument, but I mention it as that which natural reason doth suggest to the most brutish and ignorant of men. Psal. xciv. 8, 9, 10. “ Understand, ye brutish among the people ; and ye fools, when will ye be wise ? he that planted the ear, shall he not hear ? he that formed the eye, shall he not see ?”

3. The denial of this perfection to God, argues many other imperfections in the divine nature. Nothing would more eclipse the divine nature, than to take away this perfection from it ; this would bring

an universal obscurity upon God's other perfections; this would be to put out the light of heaven, and to turn "the brightness of the morning" into the "shadow of death." If we remove this perfection from God, we deny his wisdom. He that does not know the nature and qualities of things, cannot know how to apply means to ends, to fit or suit one thing to another: and we weaken his power. What an impotent and ineffectual thing would power be without knowledge? what irregular things would it produce? what untoward combinations of effects would there be, if infinite power were let loose to act without the conduct of knowledge and understanding? And, consequently, we take away his providence; for without knowledge there can be no counsel, no fore-cast of events, no provision for the future; no government of the world. And this is not all; for without knowledge there could be no such thing as goodness; for he is not good that does good out of ignorance, or from a blind necessity. There could be no veracity, nor justice, nor mercy in God; for all these suppose knowledge. He that speaks truth must know it; he that is just, must understand right from wrong; he that shews mercy, must know who are miserable, and how they may be relieved; and not to labour in a thing so plain and easy: take away the knowldge of God, and you render him incapable of any honour from his creatures; for if we know not what honour we do him, it is lost labour to give him any. And that we may see these are the deductions of natural reason, without the advantage of revelation, we shall find the heathens, who were destitute of divine revelation, did attribute this perfection to God. Tully tells us, that Thales was wont to say, *Deos omnia*

cernere;

cernere; and we know the heathens were wont to swear, *Diis immortalibus testibus interpositis*, which is an owning of his omniscience: *Quis enim non timeat Deum omnia pervidentem, & cogitantem, & animadvertentem, curiosum & negotii plenum Deum*, de Nat. Deor. l. 1.

2. From scripture and divine revelation. I will not heap up all those testimonies of scripture, which might be gathered together upon this argument; I will only instance in two or three: Job xxxvi. 4. "He that is perfect in knowledge, is with thee;" xxxvii. 16. "Dost thou know the wondrous works of him who is perfect in knowledge?"

Hither we may refer those texts which represent God by way of condescension to our infirmity, as having eyes and ears, which signify his knowledge of what is done in the world; and those which speak of him as communicating to us all the knowledge which we have; "he giveth wisdom to the wise, and understanding to them that know understanding," Dan. ii. 21. And those which speak of God, as knowing the most secret things, "the hidden things of darkness," the hearts and the thoughts of men; and those things which are at the greatest distance, as future things; and of the greatest uncertainty, as the contingent acts of free creatures; each of these I shall particularly consider; for in proving that God knows all these, his knowledge of all other things will be proved with advantage: for if any thing be out of the reach of the divine understanding, it must in all probability be either those things which are secret and hidden, as men's secret actions, or their thoughts; or else those things which are to come, and depend upon no certain cause, as future contingencies: and the proving of this may

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be of great use to us, as having a great influence upon practice; it tends very much to the advancement of religion, and the good government of our lives. I begin with the

1. Of these, viz. That God takes very exact and particular notice of all the actions of men, even those that are most secret. And in the handling of this, I shall speak distinctly to these three things.

1. That God takes knowledge of all our actions; "his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings," Job xxxiv. 21.

2. That he is a curious observer of them; "he seeth all his goings, he marks all his steps," takes very exact and particular notice of all that we do.

3. He takes notice of those actions which are most secret and hidden; "there is no darkness nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves," Job xxxiv. 22.

1. That God takes notice of all our actions. And that this notion was planted in the mind of man, and a beam of the light which comes with us into the world, will appear by the general agreement of heathens in it. I will but produce one or two testimonies to this purpose. Tully lays down this principle, as that which makes men regular and orderly, and fit for society: *sit igitur hoc persuasum civibus, qualis quisque sit, quid agat, quid in se admittat deos intueri.* Socrates, as Xenophon tells us, was wont to say, πάντα θεῶς εἶδέναι τὰ τε λεγόμενα καὶ πράττιμενα καὶ τὰ σιγῇ βεβηλόμενα. Arrian, in his discourse upon Epictetus, tells us, it is necessary that every one should be persuaded of this, ὅτι ἕκαστον τῶν πραττομένων ἐφορᾶται ὑπὸ τῶ θεῶ, "that every thing that is done by men is seen of God."

The

The scripture frequently mentions this, Pſal. cxxxix. 1, &c. Prov. v. 21. "The ways of man are before the eyes of the LORD, and he pondereth all his goings." Jer. xxxii. 19. "Thine eyes are open upon all the ways of the ſons of men, to give every one according to his ways, and according to the fruit of his doings."

2. He is a curious obſerver, one that takes exact notice of all that we do. Job ſaith, "he ſeeth all our ſteps;" and Solomon, that "he pondereth all our goings;" the word is, "he weighs them in a balance." So 1 Sam. ii. 3. "The LORD is a God of knowledge, by him actions are weighed." Job xxxi. 4. "Doth he not ſee my ways, and count all my ſteps?" which doth not imply the difficulty, but the perfection and exactneſs of God's knowledge; he knows the quality of our actions, and all the circumſtances of them, all the degrees of good and evil that are in them; whatever may commend an action, or blemiſh it; whatever may aggravate a ſin, or excuſe it. Iſa. xxvi. 7. "Thou moſt upright doth weigh the path of the juſt." There's not a good word that we ſpeak, but God hears it, Mal. iii. 16. "And the LORD hearkened and heard, and a book of remembrance was written before him;" and all we do is "noted in his book, Pſal. lvi. 8.

3. He takes notice of thoſe actions which are moſt ſecret and hidden, the good as well as bad; when we "do our alms in ſecret," when we "enter into our cloſets and ſhut the doors, our father ſeeth in ſecret," Mat. vi. Nor can we retire our ſelves to any place, where we can ſin ſo as God ſhall not ſee us, where we can hide our ſins from his ſight, or our ſelves from his wrath. Hear how ſenſibly a heathen

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heathen speaks of this; ὅταν κλείσητε τὰς θύρας, καὶ σκοτῶ ἐνδον ποιήσετε, μέμνηθε μηδέποτε λέγειν ὅτι μόνοι ἐστέ· ἔγὰρ ἔστε, ἀλλ' ὁ θεὸς ἐνδον ἐστὶ, καὶ ὁ ὑμέτερος δαίμων ἐστὶ, τίς τούτοις χρῆα φωτὸς, εἰς πᾶν βλέπειν τί ποιεῖτε; Arrian in Ep. l. i. c. 14.

The scripture is full of testimonies to this purpose, Psal. xc. 8. "Thou hast set our iniquities before thee, and our secret sins in the light of thy countenance;" those sins which we commit in the dark are in the light of the divine knowledge, "darkness and light are all one to him;" Psal. cxxxix. 11, 12. Jer. xvi. 17, 23, 24. "Can any hide himself in secret places, that I shall not see him?"

II. GOD knows the hearts and thoughts of men, which implies these two things.

1st. His perfect knowledge of them.

2dly. That this is his peculiar prerogative.

1st. GOD perfectly knows the hearts of men, Jer. xvii. 10. "I the LORD search the heart, and try the reins;" where by heart and reins, which are the most inward parts of the body, and lie least open to discovery, are signified the most secret thoughts and motions of the soul; these GOD is said to search and try, not as if it were a work of labour and difficulty to the divine knowledge to penetrate the hearts of men, and to dive into their thoughts, but to signify to us the perfection and exactness of the divine knowledge; as when men would know a thing exactly, they search into every part of it, and examine every thing narrowly; so GOD is said "to search the heart," to signify to us that he knows the hearts of men, as thoroughly as we do any thing upon the strictest search and most diligent examination; upon the same account he is said elsewhere in scripture "to weigh the spirits of men," Prov. xvi.

2. "All

2. "All the ways of man are clean in his own eyes, but the LORD weigheth the spirits;" that is, he hath as perfect a knowledge of the secret motions and inclinations of mens hearts, as men have of those things which they weigh in a balance with the greatest exactness.

Now that GOD hath this perfect knowledge of mens hearts, the scripture frequently declares to us; that he knows the hearts of all men, 1 Kings viii. 39. "For thou, even thou, knowest the hearts of all the children of men." 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. "The LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts." How close and reserved soever men may be, what disguise soever they may use to hide their purposes from men, yet GOD sees them; the things which are most dark and secret are open to his view, Psal. xlv. 21. "He knoweth the secrets of the hearts," Prov. xv. 11. "Hell and destruction are before him, how much more the hearts of the children of men?" Whatever pretences men may make, GOD sees through them, and discovers the very intentions of their hearts. Psal. vii. 9. The righteous LORD trieth the heart and reins." Heb. iv, 13. It is said there of "the word of GOD," that it is "a discerner of the thoughts and intentions of the heart; for all things are naked and open to the eye of him with whom we have to do, and there is no creature that is not manifest in his sight;" nay he knows our thoughts at a distance, what they will be, before any actually are, Psal. cxxxix. 2. "Thou knowest my thoughts afar off." 'Tis true indeed every man is conscious to his own thoughts, and privy to the motions of his own mind, when they are present, and when they are past, if he have not forgot them; but

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but no man knows what he shall think to morrow, but this God knows, for he knows us more intimately and thoroughly than we do our selves; "God is greater than our hearts, and knows all things," 1 John iii. 20.

And though the scripture had not revealed this so plainly, yet we had not been wholly ignorant of it; it is a principle implanted in us, and born with us, as being part of that natural notion which men have of God; the reason of our minds tells us, that God knows our hearts; and the fears and jealousies of our minds are an evidence of it.

(1st.) The reason of every man's mind tells him, that the supreme being, whom we call God, is endowed with all perfection, and among his other perfections, that "he excels in knowledge;" and to the perfection of knowledge it is required, that it extend it self to all objects, and that nothing be exempted from it. The knowledge of God in respect of all objects, is like the sun in respect of this lower world, "nothing is hid from the light of it." We have naturally this apprehension of God, that he is an immense being, every where present, that he intimately penetrates all places and things, and consequently that he is present to our spirits, and sees all the motions of our minds, and discerns the very secrets of our hearts; and there can be no such thing as secrecy and retirement from an eye that is every where, and a knowledge that pierceth into all things.

And to convince us that these are the dictates of natural reason, without the help and assistance of divine revelation, we shall find that the heathens, who had only the advantage of natural light, were firmly possess'd with this apprehension, that God knows the hearts of men. This may be sufficiently collected from

from the frequent sayings of the wiser heathens to this purpose ; that the best and most acceptable worship of the Deity is that which is inward, that of the heart and mind. To this sense Tully speaks, *cultus autem deorum est optimus, idemque castissimus atque sanctissimus plenissimusque pietatis, ut eos semper purâ, integrâ, atque incorruptâ mente & voce veneremur* ; “ The best and holiest worship of the gods “ is to worship them with a pure, and upright, and “ sincere mind.” To the same purpose is that known saying of the poet,

*Compositum jus fasque animi, sanctosque recessus
Mentis, & incoctum generoso pectus honesto,
Hæc cedo ut admoveam templis & farre litabo.*

“ do but offer to God a mind inwardly resolved to “ be just and honest, and the plainest sacrifice “ will please him.” Now from hence, that they judged the purity of our hearts and thoughts, and an honest disposition of mind, to be most acceptable to their gods, we may certainly conclude, that they did most firmly believe that God knows the secrets of mens hearts ; otherwise there had been no need for men to endeavour to recommend themselves this way to the divine acceptance.

But we need not argue this by consequence, there are many express passages in their writings, which do sufficiently signify their belief, of this principle. Thales, one of their most ancient philosophers, being asked, “ if an unjust man could conceal himself from “ God ?” he answered, “ he cannot so much as hide “ from him the very thoughts and design of it.” Socrates (as Xenophon tells us) was wont to inculcate this principle upon his scholars, that “ the gods “ know all things, what we say, and what we do,

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“and what we think in silence.” To the same purpose Arrian in his disertations upon Epictetus, laying down the principles of a virtuous life, “first of all, saith he, “we must learn this, that there is a God who takes “care of the world, and that there is nothing hid “from him, not only what we do, but not so much “as what we think and design.” So likewise Tully in his book of laws, “let every man be firmly “persuaded of this, that the gods see what every “man is, and with what mind and devotion they “serve them:” I will add but one testimony more, and that is of Seneca in his epistles, *nihil Deo clausum est, interest animis nostris, & cogitationibus mediis intervenit*, “we can keep nothing close from “God, for he is present to our minds, and intimate “to our thoughts;” so that you see this principle is deeply rooted in the minds of men, and that men do naturally reason themselves into it.

(2.) The natural fears of men are likewise a secret acknowledgment of this; and I take this to be a great truth, that a man’s natural actions, and such as happen upon surprize and without deliberation, are a better argument of the intimate sense of our minds, and do more truly discover what lies at the bottom of our hearts, and what notions are natural to us, than our contrived and deliberate discourse. If I see a man upon the sudden sight of a serpent recoil and start back, though he tell me never so often that he is not afraid, yet I am sufficiently convinced of the contrary, because I see in his countenance and carriage a natural acknowledgment of fear and danger; so if men find that upon the designing of a secret wickedness, which never went further than their own hearts, their consciences do sting and lash them, that they have a sense of guilt, and feel inward frights and

and horrors, whatever they may say to the contrary; this is a natural acknowledgment of an invisible eye that sees them, and disallows their wicked designs. If that be true which the heathen poet says, that

*Scelus intra se tacitum qui cogitat ullum,
Facti crimen habet.*

“ He that meditates any secret wickedness in his heart, is guilty to himself, as if he had committed it; this is a plain confession, that the man stands in awe of something besides himself, and is jealous that there is one that is conscious to what he thinks.

2. That to have a perfect and thorough knowledge of mens hearts, is the peculiar prerogative of God. This is implied in the answer to that question, “ who can know the heart of man? Jer. xvii. 10. “ I the LORD search the heart, and try the reins;” this is the prerogative of God, and one of his chief titles, that he is καρδιογνώστης, a knower of the heart, 1 Kings viii. 39. “ Thou, even thou only knowest the hearts of all the children of men.” Men may make a probable conjecture at the thoughts and designs of others, from their words and actions; but God only knows them. Men are conscious to their own thoughts and purposes; “ the spirit of a man that is in him, knows the things of a man;” but they cannot see into the secrets of another man’s mind; ’tis God alone that knows the hearts of all men; the heart of a man is a privileged place, and the secret and inward workings of it are not subject to the cognizance of any but God alone. The limits of human knowledge are the outward appearances of actions, 1 Sam. xvi. 7. “ The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the out-

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“ward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart;” our knowledge is but superficial, and glides upon the outside and surface of things, but the divine knowledge pierceth to the very center of every thing. Now the darkeſt place, the moſt inward retirement, the privateſt cloſet in the whole world, is the heart of man, and this GOD only is privy to; *Deus auctor omnium & ſpeculator omnium, à quo nihil ſecretum eſſe poteſt, tenebris intereſt, intereſt & cogitationibus noſtris quaſi alteris tenebris*, ſaith Min. Foelix, “GOD made all things, and ſees all things, and therefore nothing can be ſecret from him; he is preſent in darkneſs, and he is preſent to the thoughts of men, which are as it were another and a thicker darkneſs.”

The devil indeed pretends to this knowledge; he would take upon him to know the integrity of Job's heart better than GOD himſelf; and that notwithstanding the teſtimony which GOD gave of his integrity, yet if he were but ſoundly tried by affliction, he would renounce GOD, and curſe him to his face: but the event proved how groundleſs and malicious this ſuggeſtion was. But there is a far greater difficulty in this matter, from the paſſages of ſome divines concerning the devil's immediate acceſs to the minds of men, and his power to caſt wicked thoughts into them; which ſeems by conſequence to grant him ſome knowledge of mens hearts; for by the ſame reaſon that he can imprint thoughts upon men's minds, he may ſee thoſe that are imprinted there.

That the devil is a very ſagacious ſpirit, and can make very ſhrewd conjectures at the bent and inclinations of men's minds, and the probable workings of our thoughts, from a general knowledge and obſervation

ervation of our tempers and passions, of our interests and designs, and from the general tenor of our actions in publick and private, and from our prayers and confessions to God (if he permit him at any time to be so near good men) I think there is no doubt: but this is far from a knowledge of our hearts; all this is but conjecture, and such as men may make of one another in a lower degree.

But as to the business of casting blasphemous and despairing thoughts into the minds of men, to this I would say these three things.

1. That there are few of these cases which may not more probably be resolved into the wickedness and infidelity of men's hearts, or into the darkness and melancholy of our tempers, which are apt to raise and suggest strange thoughts to men, and such as we may be apt to think have no rise from our selves, not considering what an odd and strange influence the disorder of our bodily humours may have upon our minds, as we see in violent fevers, and several other diseases; and melancholy, though the workings of it are more still and quiet, is as truly a disease as any other; so that I chuse rather to ascribe as much of these to a bodily distemper as may be, because it is a very uncomfortable consideration, to think that the devil hath such an immediate power upon the minds of men.

2. I do not see how by any means it can be granted, without prejudice to this prerogative of God, which the scripture plainly gives him, of being "the only knower of the heart," that the devil can have so immediate an access to our minds, as to put wicked thoughts into them; nor can I think, that when it is said, 1 Chron. xxi. 1. that "Satan provoked David to number the people," and Luke xxii. 3.

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xxii. 3. That "the devil entred into Judas," and Acts v. 3. That "Satan had filled the heart of Ananias to lie unto the Holy Ghost," and Eph. ii. 2. That "the devil is the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience:" I say, I cannot think that any, or all of these expressions do amount to such an immediate power of putting wicked thoughts into men's minds; but they only signify, that the devil hath a greater hand in some sins than others, and that a heart wickedly bent and inclined, give him a great advantage to tempt men more powerfully, by presenting the occasions of such wicked thoughts and actions to them; for it is usual, in scripture-phrase, as to ascribe all good motions to God's spirit, so all evil thoughts and actions to the devil, not that he is the immediate cause of them, but because he is always ready to tempt men to them, and one way or other to promote them.

3. I see no reason to grant (as many have done) an immediate power to the devil over the fancies and imaginations of men, and that he may know the workings of them, though not the secret thoughts of men's minds; for this seems to me to be in effect to grant him the knowledge of men's hearts, and to give him a key to that closet which God hath reserved to himself: for it is a very nice distinction which is here made between the thoughts of men's minds, and the images of their fancies; and if these should happen to be but words that signify the same thing, we shall unawares intrench upon the prerogative of God. Therefore because the scripture is a stranger to these nice and subtile distinctions between the imaginations of the fancy, and the thoughts of the heart, I think it is much safer to assert the prerogative of God in that latitude that the scrip-

Scripture useth the word heart; for all the inward motions of the mind, for the thoughts and intentions of the heart, and roundly to affirm that all the inward motions of our souls are totally exempt from the immediate cognizance of any other spirit but God's alone; and that neither angel nor devil hath any further knowledge of them, than may be collected and inferred in a way of probable conjecture from the particular knowledge of men's tempers and habits and designs, and the course of their actions. I proceed to the

III. Particular; GOD's knowledge of future events.

This GOD purposes as the way to discern the true GOD from idols, Isaiah xli. 21, &c. "Produce your cause, saith the LORD, bring forth your strong reasons, saith the king of Jacob;" that is, let them bring some argument that may convince us that they are gods; and he instanceth in foretelling future events, ver. 22. "Let them shew the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Shew the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that ye are gods." GOD puts it upon this issue, if they can foretel future things, then they are gods; if not; they are "vanity, and a work of naught, and he is an abomination that chuseth them," ver. 24. By "things to come," I understand such effects as do not depend upon any necessary cause, but upon the will of free agents, and so may be, or may not be; from whence it is plain, that it is the prerogative of GOD, proper and peculiar to him, to know future events. And here I shall consider these two things.

1. That GOD knows future events.

2. That

2, That he only knows them.

1. God knows future events ; which will appear from the dictates of natural light, and from scripture.

(1.) From the dictates of natural light, as it is a perfection, and that which among men is accounted the best part of wisdom ; and unless this did belong to God, how could he govern the world ? The heathens, except only the Epicureans, generally granted this, as appears in those wise counsels, which we frequently meet with in them to this purpose, that we should not be anxious for the future ; but having done our endeavour, leave the events of things to God, who only knows them and disposeth them.

*Permittes ipsis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris.* Juv.

And afterward, saith he, “ We are importunate
“ with God for wife and children :” *At illis notum,
qui pueri, qualisque futura sit uxor.* And that this
was their opinion, appears yet more clearly from
those apprehensions which they had of divination.
Tully lays down this for a principle, *deos posse nobis
signa futurarum rerum ostendere* ; de legibus. And in
his book de Divin. he tells us, “ that there was such
“ a thing as divination, for it was an old opinion,”
*jam usque ab heroicis ducta temporibus, eaque Pop.
Rom. & omnium gentium firmata consensu*, and after-
ward, that this divination was not, *sine instinctu
afflatuque divino.*

I know they did variously explain this, according
to their several opinions about fate and contingency,
and their apprehensions about the providence of God.
One sect of them, the Stoicks, held that there was a
fatal chain of causes from first to last, and things did
necessarily follow one another ; and by this means
they

they made fore-knowledge easy and explicable ; and though in their disputes they seem to grant no such things as events and contingencies, yet they are agreed in the thing, that those things which we call events, though they would not call them so, were fore-known to God. And for this I shall only cite one testimony of Seneca, speaking of God's fore-knowledge of the most contingent things, the dispositions of men long before they are born ; he adds, *nota est enim illis operis sui series, omniumque illis rerum per manus suas iturarum scientia in aperto semper est ; nobis ex abdito subit ; & quæ repentina putamus, illis provisa veniunt & familiaria* ; and how peremptory soever this sect is in their disputes about fate, yet when they speak of the *τὰ ἐφ' ἡμῶν*, and generally in their moral discourses, they seem plainly to me to exempt the will of man from this fatal necessity.

And those other sects of the philosophers that denied fate, did generally grant " God's fore-knowledge of contingent things." I grant indeed, that they did rather make God's fore-knowledge an arbitrary and voluntary, than a necessary perfection, that is, that God, when he pleased to apply himself to it, could fore-know all future events : but their general opinion was, that as his providence did not extend to small and inconsiderable things, so neither his fore-knowledge. But Tully seems to attribute a very perfect providence to him, and a fore-knowledge of the least things, *Quis non timeat omnia providentem, cogitantem, animadvertentem, & omnia ad se pertinere putantem, curiosum & negotii plenum Deum ?* But I cannot say he is constant to himself : but they all agree in granting to him this perfection of knowing all future things, if he pleased to trouble

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himself with it; and had they not in this mistaken the nature of God, they might easily have apprehended, that it is no trouble nor weariness to an infinite understanding, that is always in act, to know the least things how many soever they be.

2. From scripture, which gives us testimonies and arguments of it.

(1.) Testimonies, Isa. xlviii. 3, &c. Acts xv. 18. "Known unto God are all his works, from the beginning of the world, ἀπ' αἰῶνος from everlasting:" which by the way I cannot but compare with the forecited place of Seneca. *Nota enim illis operis sui series*, &c.

(2.) By arguments from scripture. I will mention but one; the clear and particular predictions of future events long before they happened, Gen. xv. 13. God foretels the children of Israel's deliverance after 430 years, which he punctually accomplished, Exod. xii. 40, 41. The prophet that prophesied against the altar at Bethel named the man that should do it, Josias, 350 years before-hand, 1 Kings xiii. 2. The deliverance of the children of Israel from the Babylonish captivity was foretold 100 years before to be done particularly by Cyrus; which is so strange, that the prophet brings it in with a preface of God's wisdom and power, Isa. xlv. 24, &c. Which was afterward precisely fulfilled, when the 70 years were expired. How are the life and death of the Messiah with many particular circumstances foretold! And did not he foretel the destruction of Jerusalem 40 years before?

But because there may be no contingency in good things, God himself may be resolved to effect them or excite men to do them, when he hath foretold them; you shall find that the worst things have been fore-

told ; the Apostacy of the children of Israel, Deut. xxxi. 16. and their infidelity in times of the gospel, Isa. liii. 1, 5, 9, 26. Our SAVIOUR foretold the treachery of Judas and Peter's denial of him : now these are so evil, that it were blasphemy to suppose the holy God to have any hand in them ; and therefore are foretold by him merely by virtue of his fore-knowledge, and the infiniteness of his understanding, which reacheth things at the greatest distance, that are most contingent.

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Of the knowledge of GOD.

I S A M, ii. 3.

The LORD is a GOD of knowledge.

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I Have considered this perfection of GOD, in some of the greatest and most difficult instances of it, his knowledge of the most secret things, the hearts of men, and future events ; against the last of which there are some objections, which I come now briefly to consider, and pass on to what remains.

Objection the first ; the impossibility of the thing. The certainty of all knowledge depends upon the certainty of the object ; therefore there cannot be a certain and determinate knowledge of any thing, but what is certainly and determinately true : but future events, which may, or may not be, have no certain and determinate truth, that is, it is not certain either that they will, or will not be, because they have no

certain cause; therefore there can be no infallible knowledge concerning them.

Answer, This I confess is the grand difficulty; I shall not be so solicitous to take it away, as to give satisfaction to it.

1. I might say, with a very fair probability, that the certainty of knowledge doth not depend upon the uncertainty of the cause, but of the object, which may be certain, though the cause be contingent. Which I prove thus; whatever event hath actually happened, as because now it is past, it is certainly true, that it was; so because it once was, it was certainly true before it was, that it would be; as in Peter's denying of CHRIST. If it be now true, that he hath denied him, it was true before, that he would deny him; and it being determinately true, God saw it as it was; so that here is an object of a certain knowledge.

2. Though we could not explain the possibility of God's knowing future contingencies, much less the manner how; yet we are sufficiently assured that God doth know them. I will give but one instance for the proof of this. Nothing more evident than the sin of Adam; yet God fore-knew this, how else was CHRIST "decreed before the foundation of the world?" CHRIST was a remedy upon the occasion of sin; now the remedy could not be designed before the sin was fore-seen: and this being certain, *cum constat de re, frustra inquiritur de modo*, "when we are certain of the thing, 'tis not necessary to know the manner." We are satisfied of many things, the manner whereof we do not know; we believe the union of the soul and body, though no man can explain how a spirit can be united to matter; we believe the continuity of matter, that is, that

the

the parts of it hang together, of which whosoever saith he can give an account, doth but betray his own ignorance. And so in many other things; that man doth not know himself, nor the measure of his own understanding, nor the nature and obscurity of things, that will not confess himself posed in many things, that doth not acknowledge that there are many ἀ-φάνηστα, many things, the manner whereof is unimaginable, and of which our best reason and understanding can give no account.

3. 'Tis very unreasonable to expect we should know all the ways which infinite knowledge hath of knowing things. We have but finite faculties and measures, which bear no proportion to infinite powers and objects. Could we explain the manner how infinite knowledge knows things, we should be like God in knowledge, our understandings would be infinite like his; and in this case especially it becomes us to put on the modesty of creatures, and to remember that we are finite and limited. Some arrogant spirits take it for an affront to their understandings, that any one should expect they should believe any thing, though they have the highest assurance of it, if they cannot explain the particular manner of it; they make nothing to deny God's knowledge of future events, unless they may be satisfied of the particular way how he knows them.

I know there are those who undertake to explain the particular manner. Some say, that God sees future events *in speculo voluntatis*; others say, that the eternity of God is actually commensurate to all duration, as his immensity to all space, and so God doth not so properly fore-see and fore-know, as see and know future things by the presentiality and co-existence of all things in all eternity; for they say, that

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that future things are actually present and existing to God, though not in *mensurâ propriâ*, yet in *mensurâ alienâ*: the school-men have much more of this jargon and canting language; and I envy no man the understanding these phrases; but to me they seem to signify nothing, but to have been words invented by idle and conceited men, which a great many ever since, lest they should seem to be ignorant, would seem to understand; but I wonder most, that men, when they have amused and puzzled themselves and others with hard words, should call this explaining things.

The sum of the answer is this; that when we have done all we can, God's fore-knowledge of future events may seem contradictory and impossible to us, much less do I expect ever to be able to give a particular account of the manner of it: but we have sufficient assurance of the thing, and unless we had infinite understandings, it were vanity to pretend to explain all the ways of infinite knowledge.

Secondly, It is objected, that if we can admit such a knowledge in God as seems contradictory and impossible to our reason, why may we not allow and frame such notions of his goodness and justice?

To this I answer, there is a great difference between those perfections of God which are imitable, and those which are not. Knowledge of future events is a perfection wherein we are not bound to be like God; and if we are assured of the thing, that he doth know them, it is not necessary that we should know the manner of it, and disentangle it from contradiction and impossibility: but it is otherwise in God's goodness and justice, which are imitable: he that imitates, endeavours to be like something that he knows, and we must have a clear idea and
notion

notion of that which we would bring ourselves to the likeness of; these perfections of God we are capable of knowing, and therefore the knowledge of these perfections is chiefly recommended to us in scripture, Jer. ix. 24. By these God reveals himself, and declares his name, and makes himself known to us, even by those attributes which declare his goodness, and mercy, and justice, Exod. xxxiv. 6, 7. Psal. lxxxvi. 15. Deut. xxxii. 3, 4, 5. When God would give a description of himself to Moses, he promises "to cause his goodness to pass before him." So that it doth not follow, that because God's knowledge of future events is to be admitted, notwithstanding the seeming contradiction and impossibility of it, therefore we are to admit of any notion of God's justice or goodness that seems contradictory or impossible. The

Third objection is made up of several inconveniencies that would follow from God's knowledge of future events.

1. It would prejudice the liberty of the creature. For if God have an infallible knowledge of what we will do, then we cannot but do what he infallibly fore-sees we will do; for otherwise his knowledge would be fallible.

Answer, God's fore-knowledge lays no necessity upon the event: in every event, we may consider the effect in itself, or with relation to the cause, and the manner how it comes to pass; considered in itself, it is future, with relation to it's causes, it is contingent. God sees it as both, and so, as that which until it is, may be, or not be; and when it comes to pass, he sees the man do it freely; and so before it be done, it hath no necessity; but upon supposition of fore-sight; as when it is, it hath upon supposition

position that it is, as Origen excellently explains it. Fore-knowledge is not the cause of the things that are fore-known; but because the thing is future and shall be, this is the reason why it is fore-known; for it doth not, because it was known, come to pass; but because it was to come to pass, therefore it was fore-known; and bare knowledge is no more the cause of any event, which because it is known must infallibly be, than my seeing a man run, is the cause of his running; which, because I do see, is infallibly so.

2dly. If God infallibly fore-knows what men will do, how can he be serious in his exhortations to repentance, in his expectation of it, and his grieving for the impenitency of men?

Answer. All these are founded in the liberty of our actions. God exhorts to repentance and expects it, because, by his grace, we may do it: he is said to grieve for our impenitency, because we may do otherwise, and will not. Exhortations are not in vain themselves, but very proper to their end; though, through our obstinacy and hardness, they may be rendred vain to us, and without effect. If the weight of the objection lies upon serious, and you ask how God can exhort men seriously to that which he fore-sees that they will not do; those whom he fore-knows will be finally impenitent? I answer, if his exhortations were not serious, he could not fore-see the final impenitency of men. To fore-see men's final impenitency, is to fore-see their wilful contempt of God's warnings and exhortations, and rejection of his grace: now mens wilful contempt of his warnings and exhortations cannot be fore-seen, unless God fore-see that his exhortations are serious, and in good earnest.

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Having answered the objections against God's fore-knowing future events, I proceed to shew,

II. That God only knows future events. Isa. xlv. 6, 7. " Thus saith the LORD the king of Israel, and his redeemer the LORD of hosts, I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me there is no God: and who, as I, shall call, and shall declare it, and set it in order for me, since I appointed the ancient people? and the things that are coming, and shall come? let them shew unto them." Isa. xlv. 9, 10. " Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is none else; I am God and there is none like me. Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure."

The reason is evident, because the knowledge of future events is beyond the reach of any finite understanding; especially if we grant it to be beyond our finite understanding, to explain the possibility of such a knowledge; for, to be sure, that is out of the reach of our knowledge, which we cannot so much as understand how it is possible it should be known by any understanding.

But it may here be objected; did not the oracles among the heathens foretel several things, which Christians are satisfied came from the devil? I have not time at present to examine the business of heathen oracles; I could easily shew there was much imposture in them: but grant they were really delivered and given out by a spirit; yet the darkness and ambiguity, the affected and contrived ambiguity, is such, as shews that the devil was conscious to himself of the uncertainty of his knowledge in those matters: and those few that came to pass, and are in

any tolerable sense said to be accomplished, were in such matters, either wherein prudent conjecture might go far (and I grant the devil to be a sagacious spirit;) or else in disjunctive cases, as when there are but two ways for a thing to be, it must either be so, or so, in which a bold guessing may often hit right: but guessing at future things, is far from a knowledge of them, which only can clearly be made out by punctual and particular predictions of things, with circumstances of time and person, such as we find in scripture in many instances, to the prediction of which, the greatest sagacity, and the utmost guessing could do nothing, such as those predictions of which I gave instances out of scripture.

I have now done with the first general head I proposed to be spoken to from these words, viz. To prove that this attribute of knowledge belongs to God. I proceed to the

Second, viz. To consider the perfection and prerogative of the divine knowledge; which I shall speak to in these following particulars.

1. GOD's knowledge is present and actual, his eye is always open, and every thing is in the view of it. The knowledge of the creature is more power than act; it is not much that we are capable of knowing, but there is very little that we do actually know: it is but one thing that we can fix our thoughts upon at once, and apply our minds to; we can remove them to another object, but then we must take off our minds from the former, and quit the actual knowledge of it: but the knowledge of God is an actual and steady comprehension of things; he being every where present, and all eye, nothing can escape his sight, but all the objects are at once in the view of the divine understanding. Heb. iv. 13. "Neither

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“ is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and open unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.”

2. God's knowledge is an intimate and thorough knowledge, whereby he knows the very nature and essence of things. The knowledge which we have of things is but in part, but outward and superficial; our knowledge glides upon the superficies of things, but doth not penetrate into the intimate nature of them, it seldom reacheth further than the skin and outward appearance of things; we do not know things in their realities, but as they appear and are represented to us with all their masks and disguises: but God knows things as they are. 1 Sam. xvi. 7.

“ The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart: God knows things throughout, all that can be known of them. The quick and piercing eye of God penetrates into every thing, the light of the divine understanding lays all things “ open and naked,” Heb. iv. 13. In which expression the apostle alludes to the sacrifices of beasts, which were flead, and cleft down the back bone, that the priest might look into them, and see whether they were without blemish. To the eye of our understandings most objects are close, and have their skins upon them; but to the eyes of God all things are uncovered and dissected, and lie open to his view.

3. God's knowledge is clear and distinct. Our understandings in the knowledge of things are liable to great confusion; we are often deceived with the near likenesses and resemblance of things, and mistake one thing for another; our knowledge is but a twilight, which doth not sufficiently separate and distinguish

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distinguish things from one another ; we see things many times together, and in an heap, and do but know them in gross : but there is no confusion in the divine understanding, that is a clear light which separates and distinguisheth things of the greatest nearness and resemblance ; God hath a particular knowledge of the least things, Luke xii. 7. “ even “ the very hairs of your head are all numbred ; ” those things which are of the least consideration, and have the greatest likeness to one another ; “ the very “ hairs of your head ” are severally and distinctly known to God.

4. God’s knowledge is certain and infallible. We are subject to doubt and error in our understanding of things ; every thing almost imposeth upon our understandings, and tinctures our minds, and makes us look on things otherwise than they are ; our temper and complexion, our education and prejudice, our interest and advantage, our humours and distempers ; these all misrepresent things, and darken our minds, and seduce our judgments, and betray us to error and mistake : but the divine understanding is a clear, fixed, constant, and undisturbed light, a pure mirror that receives no stain from affection, or interest, or any other thing. Men are many times confident and apt to impose upon others, as if they were infallible : but this is the prerogative of God, the privilege of the divine understanding, that it is secure from all possibility of error ; it is God only “ that cannot lie,” Tit. i. 2. because he cannot be deceived ; the infallibility of God is the foundation of his veracity.

5. The knowledge of God is easy, and without difficulty. We must dig deep for knowledge, take a great deal of pains to know a little ; we do not attain

attain the knowledge of things without search and study, and great intention of mind; we strive to comprehend some things, but they are so vast that we cannot: other things are at such a distance, that our understanding is too weak to discern them; other things are so little, and small, and nice, that our understanding cannot lay hold of them, we cannot contract our minds to such a point as to fasten upon them; but the understanding of God being infinite, there is nothing at a distance from it, nothing too great and vast for it's comprehension; nor is there any thing so little that it can escape his knowledge and animadversion. The great wisdom of Solomon is compared to "the sand on the sea-shore;" the shore is vast, but the sands are little, (saith one) to signify that the vast mind of Solomon did comprehend the least things. 'Tis much more true of God; his understanding is a vast comprehension of the least things, as well as the greatest; and all this God does without difficulty or pain; he knows all things without study, and his understanding is in continual exercise without weariness. How many things are there which we cannot find out without search, without looking narrowly into, and bending our minds to understand them? But all things are obvious to God, and lie open to his view.

He is said indeed in scripture "to search the heart" and "to try the reins" and "to weigh the spirits," but these expressions do not signify the painfulness, but the perfection of his knowledge; that he knows those things as perfectly, as we can do any thing about which we use the greatest diligence and exactness.

6. The knowledge of God is universal, and extends to all objects. We know but a few things,

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our ignorance is greater than our knowledge, *maxima pars eorum quæ scimus, est minima pars eorum quæ nescimus*: but the divine understanding is vast and comprehensive, and by an imperious view commands all objects; "he is greater than our hearts, and "knoweth all things;" he knows himself, and the excellency and perfection of his own nature, and the secrets of his will, 1 Cor. ii. 11. "The spirit of "God searcheth the deep things of God;" he knows all other things that are not, and all things that are, in all differences of time, their powers and qualities. The knowledge of God is infinite; Psal. cxlvii. 5. "His understanding is infinite:" he knows himself, and his own perfections, and all the possibilities of things, which are all infinite. Now the understanding of God being infinite is incapable of any addition, or diminution, or change. Our finite understandings are liable to alterations; they may grow or decline: but the knowledge of God is a full, constant light, it is always the same, not liable to any eclipse, nor capable of any exaltation or improvement, but remains for ever the same.

Thirdly, I come now to draw some inferences from the several parts of this discourse.

I. From the perfection of God's knowledge.

1. The perfection of the divine knowledge calls for our veneration. Every excellency commands reverence, and raiseth our admiration, and none more than knowledge: there is nothing that we value our selves or others more by, than this: the highest knowledge of man, the most glorious understanding, that ever any one of the sons of men were endowed with, is, compared to the knowledge of God, but as a glow-worm to the sun." If we admire these "Candles of the LORD," which shine

so imperfectly in the dark ; if we reverence a little knowledge, compassed about with ignorance ; how shall we admire “ the Father of lights, in whom is “ no darkness at all,” that knowledge which hath nothing of blemish or imperfection in it !

We may hence learn humility, and that on this double account, as we have all our knowledge from him ; “ what have we that we have not received ?” And as our knowledge is very imperfect, when compared with the divine understanding. We are blind and ignorant ; ’tis but a few things that we are capable of knowing ; and we know but a few of those things which our natures are capable of knowing ; and of those things we do know, our knowledge is very imperfect, ’tis slight and superficial, attended with much difficulty and uncertainty in the attaining of it, and error and confusion in the use of it ; the clearest reason, and the brightest understanding of man hath many flaws and defects in it ; so that the more we know of God, and of our selves, the more humble we shall be. It is “ an empty knowledge, “ and falsely so called” that “ puffs up ;” as the empty ears of corn are pert, and raise up themselves ; but those which are big and full, droop and hang down their heads ; so ’tis only ignorance that is proud, and lifts men up, but true knowledge makes men humble.

3. This is matter of comfort and encouragement. He knows our wants and weakness, and “ will lay “ no more upon us than we are able to bear ; for “ he considers that we are but dust ;” he knows the rage and malice of our enemies, and can, when he pleases,” put a hook in their nose,” and “ his bridle in their lips,” as he did to Senacherib, 2 Kings xix. 28.

1. From

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I. From GOD's knowing our secret actions, infer,

I. If GOD sees our most secret actions, this discovers and confutes the secret atheism of many. He that commits the most secret sin denies the omniscience of GOD. Thus David describes the atheism of some in his days: "he hath said in his heart, GOD hath forgot; he hideth his face, he will never see it: the LORD shall not see, neither shall the GOD of Jacob regard it." And is not this, in effect, to deny GOD's being? for it is to deny him to be what he is. A man may as well deny there is a sun, as deny that it shines and enlightens the world.

There are some relicks of this even in the best men, which do at some times discover themselves, Psal. lxxiii. 10, 11. "Therefore his people return hither; and waters of a full cup are wrung out to them:" and they say, "how doth GOD know? is there knowledge in the most High?" that is, the people of GOD come to this, when they are come to an afflicted state, and see the prosperity of wicked men; they come to this, to question the providence of GOD, whether he takes knowledge of the affairs of the world. But this atheism reigns in wicked men; while they live in their sins, they live in the denial of GOD's omniscience: for did men really believe that "GOD sees in secret," that his eye perceiveth the darkness, and lays open and naked all things before it, how durst they lie, and steal, and swear falsely? Vain man! why dost thou seek darkness and retirement? How art thou alone, if thou believest that GOD is every where? How canst thou retire from him; how canst thou shut him out? If thou believest that he is the light, what security is darkness to thee? If he look upon thee, who is the greatest

greatest and best person in the world, who is thy sovereign, thy judge, thy father, and thy master, and thy best friend (for we use to reverence persons under these notions and relations, and to be ashamed to do any thing that is vile and unseemly before them;) if he, who is all this, look upon thee, why art thou not ashamed? why does not thy blood rise in thy face? Why should not shame and fear work upon the apprehension of God's seeing us, as if men did behold us? For this, that God sees thee, is a greater surprize and discovery, and threatens thee with more danger, than if the whole world stood by thee.

2. Live as those that believe this; be continually under the power of this apprehension, that God takes a particular and exact notice of all thy actions. The firm belief of this, would have a double influence upon us, it would encourage us in well-doing, and be a restraint upon us as to sin; *sic vivamus tanquam in conspectu vivamus*. Seneca. It were well if men would live as if any body saw them; but to live as if some worthy and excellent person were always present with us, and did observe us, this will be a far greater curb upon us. There are some sins of that ugliness and deformity, that a man would not commit them in the presence of any one, of a child, or a fool; and there are some persons of such worth and reverence, *quorum interventu perditique homines vitia supprimerent*. Epicurus had this good conceit of himself, that he could advise others so to act as if he stood by, *fac omnia tanquam spectet Epicurus*; but Seneca instanceth much better in Cato, or Scipio, or Lælius,

Ut sic tanquam illo spectante vivamus.

and shall not the presence of the divine majesty be an eternal restraint upon us?

This was David's course to keep himself from sin, Psal. xxxix. 1. "I will take heed to my ways, while "the wicked is before me;" how much more in the presence of God? "I have kept thy precepts and "thy testimonies, for all my ways are before thee," Psal. cxix 168. And it was wisely advised by Seneca, "that we should so live when we are among "men, as believing God sees us: and when there "is none but he sees us, let us behave ourselves before him, as if men did stare upon us."

III. God's knowledge of the heart teacheth us,

1. The folly of hypocrisy: how vain it is to make a shew of that outwardly, which inwardly and in our hearts we are not; to put on a mask of religion, and paint ourselves beautifully without, when "inwardly we are full of rottenness and uncleanness; to "honour God with our lips, when our hearts are "far from him." If we were to deal with men, this were not a very wise way, for there is danger of discovery even from them; therefore the best way for a man to seem to be any thing, is really to be what he would appear; but having to deal with God, who "knows our thoughts afar off," to whom all our disguises are transparent, and all our little arts of concealment signify nothing, 'tis a madness to hide our iniquity in our bosom. With this argument our SAVIOUR convinceth the hypocritical Pharisees, Luke xvi. 15. "Ye are they that justify your selves before "men; but God knoweth your hearts."

2. If God know your hearts, then endeavour to approve your hearts to him; charge yourselves with inward purity and holiness, because of the pure eyes which behold the most intimate and secret motions

of your souls; therefore "cleanse your hearts from wickedness: how long shall vain thoughts lodge within you?" Fear and shame from men lay a great restraint upon our outward actions; but how licentious are we many times in our hearts? What a strange freedom do we take within our own breasts? This is an argument of the secret atheism that lies at the bottom of our hearts. He that allows himself in any wicked thoughts and imaginations, which (out of regard to men) he will not put in practice, this man plainly declares, that he reverenceth men more than God; that he either disbelieves a God, or despiseth him.

Therefore "keep your hearts with all diligence," because they are peculiarly under God's inspection; and when you are ready to take the liberty of your thoughts, because no eye sees you, ask your selves, "Doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it?" "And he that keepeth thy soul, doth he not know it?" as the wise man speaks," Prov. xxiv. 12.

And whatever you do in the service of God "do it heartily as to the LORD." Indeed, if we did only worship God, "to be seen of men," an external worship would be sufficient: but religion is not intended to please men, but God; he is a spirit, and sees our spirits, therefore we must "worship him in spirit and in truth." 1 Thes. ii. 4. Not "as pleasing men, but God, who trieth our hearts." David useth this argument to his son Solomon, 1 Chron. xxviii. 9. "And thou, Solomon, my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him with a perfect heart, and with a willing mind; for the LORD searcheth all hearts, and understandeth all the imaginations of the thoughts." Whatever liberty we may take to our selves now, and

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how careless soever we are of our thoughts, and the inward frame of our hearts, yet the scripture assures us, that he, who knows our hearts, will one day judge us according to them. Jer. xvii. 10. "I the LORD search the heart, I try the reins, even to give every man according to his ways." And the apostle speaks of "a day coming wherein GOD will judge the secrets of men by JESUS CHRIST," Heb. iv. 13. Rev. ii. 23.

This is matter of encouragement to us in many cases: in our secret troubles, Psal. cxlii. 3. "When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then thou knewest my path." In cases of difficulty which depend upon the hearts of other men; which though we do not know, yet GOD knows them: So the apostles, Acts i. 24. when they did not know whom to chuse for an apostle, they refer it to GOD; and "they prayed and said, Thou, LORD, which knowest the hearts of all, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen." But especially this is matter of comfort to us, when we suffer by the calumnies and reproaches of men, when the world chargeth us with crimes of hypocrisy, and falseness, and insincerity; then to be able to appeal to "the searcher of hearts," as to our innocence and sincerity, and to say with the prophet Jeremiah "O LORD of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart, unto thee have I opened my cause," ch. xx. 12. and with St. Peter, "GOD which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness," Acts xv. 8.

4. This renders all the deep and profound policies of wicked men a vain thing. "The LORD knows the thoughts of men, that they are vanity," Psal. xciv. 11. They are vanity, because he knows them, and can defeat them; he can "bring their counsels

“to nought, and make their devices of none effect.” He is conscious to the first motions of their hearts; he sees those cobwebs which they are spinning, and can blow them away with a breath; he can snare them in their own policies, and turn “their counsels” into foolishness.” Thou that puttest a mask upon a wicked design, and hidest the malice and revenge of thine heart under a dissembling countenance, God sees thy design, and hath a thousand ways to prevent it. When the politicians of the world think they have laid their design with all imaginable caution, and that their counsels cannot miscarry, being out of all possibility of human discovery or prevention; for all this “their counsels may come to nought,” and though “they have resolved it,” yet it may “not stand; he that sets in the heavens laughs at them, the LORD hath them in derision.” As wise as they are, they are guilty of this oversight, that they did not take God into consideration, by whom they are surprized and discovered. He that sees their design, can blast it in a moment; he “can speak the word,” and “thy breath shall go forth, and thou shalt return to thy dust, and in that very day thy thoughts perish, Psal. cxlvi. 4.

5. If God only knows the hearts of men, then “what art thou, O man, that judgest another’s heart?” This condemns the uncharitableness of men, who take upon them to judge and censure men’s hearts, which is, “to speak evil of the things which they know not;” to meddle with things which do not fall under their cognizance. What St. James saith, ch. iv. 12. “There is one law-giver, that is able to save, and to destroy; who art thou that judgest another?” is proportionably true in this case; there is but “one that knows the heart; who
“art

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“ art thou then that judgest another man's heart ?”
Who art thou, O man ! that takest upon thee to sit in judgment upon thy brother, and to pass sentence upon his heart, to pronounce him a hypocrite, a wicked man, and a damned wretch ? Art thou a man, and the son of man, and wilt thou assume to thy self the prerogative of God ? Man can only look to the outward appearance ; but “ God seeth the heart.”

There's nothing doth more palpably discover the unchristian spirit of that new sect which is of late risen up amongst us, than their taking upon them to judge men's hearts, and as confidently to censure every man they meet, as if they had a window into his breast : but they are not alone guilty of this ; those who are so ready to call men hypocrites, they invade this prerogative of God. We may pronounce an action wicked, if it be contrary to the rule ; or a man wicked, as to his present state, if the general course of his life and actions be wicked ; for our SAVIOUR tells us, “ by their fruits ye shall “ know them.” This we may do, provided we be called to it, and be sure it is so : but to call any man an hypocrite, who makes an outward profession of religion, and whose external conversation is unblameable ; this is to judge a man in a matter of which thou canst have no evidence ; this is “ to ascend into heaven,” and step into “ the throne of “ God, and to be like the most High ;” for “ he, “ even he only, knows the hearts of the children “ of men.”

IV. From God's knowledge of future events, we may learn,

1. The vanity of astrology, and all other arts that pretend to foretel future events, things that depend on the will of free agents. The vanity of these
arts

arts hath been sufficiently shewn by learned men, from the weakness and uncertainty of the principles they rely upon; I shall only for the present take notice, that it contradicts this principle of religion, that "God only knows future events." From prudent collections and observations, probable conjectures may be made of what will happen in some cases; but there are no certain perspective-glasses, with which we can see future events, but divine revelation; therefore whoever takes upon him to foretel future events without divine revelation, he arrogates to himself that which is the prerogative of the Deity; and God delights to chastise the curiosity, and cros the predictions of these vain pretenders, Isa. xliv. 24, 25. "Thus saith the LORD that formed thee, I am the LORD that maketh all things, that stretcheth forth the heavens alone, that spreadeth abroad the earth by my self: that frustrateth the tokens of the liars, and maketh diviners mad; that turneth wise men backward, and maketh their knowledge foolish." As he also in scripture threatens those who consult them, and rely upon them. Those who go to astrologers, or wise men, as they call them, to know their fortunes, and enquire of the events of their life, they "forsake God," and "betake themselves to lying vanities."

2. Refer future things to God, who only knows them; trust him with all events; "cast your care upon him." When you have used your best prudence, and wisdom, and diligence for your supply and security for the future, leave the rest to God, "for your heavenly father knoweth" both your wants and your dangers. When we are over-solicitous about future things, we take God's proper

work

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work out of his hands, and usurp the government of the world. Why do we "take too much upon us?" "We are but of yesterday," and "know not what will be to morrow."

Mind your present duty and work, and leave events to God. "Secret things belong to the LORD our God; but those things that are revealed to us, and our children for ever, to do all the words of his law," Deut. xxix. 29. Do your duty, "commit the rest to God in well-doing."

In this world we are in a mix'd condition, which is made up of good and evil, of happiness and misery: what is good for us to know, is revealed, that is our duty; but in great wisdom and pity to mankind, God hath concealed and hid the rest from us. He hath hid from us the good that may happen to us, because the best things of this world are but shallow and empty, and if we could see them before-hand, we should prevent our selves in the enjoyment of them, and eat out the sweetness which is in them by delightful fore-thoughts of them: and he hath concealed future evils from us, lest we should torment our selves with the fearful expectation of them.

Prudens, futuri temporis exitum,

Caliginosâ nocte premit Deus.

Ridetque, si mortalis ultra fas trepidat.

What a folly is it to make your selves miserable with fear of being so; *ante misérias miser*. Use all wise means to prevent what you fear, and then be satisfied, and be as happy as you can 'till misery come, go not forth to meet it, "sufficient for the day is the evil thereof;" do not anticipate the evils of to morrow, and take present possession of an evil to come; "cast your care upon him" who hath promised to "care for you."

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The wisdom, glory, and sovereignty
of G O D.

J U D E, ver. 25.

*To the only wise GOD our SAVIOUR, be glory and
majesty, dominion and power, now and ever.*

I AM treating of the attributes of GOD, particularly of those which relate to the divine understanding, his knowledge and wisdom. The knowledge of GOD only implies his bare understanding of things; but his wisdom implies the skill of ordering and disposing things to the best ends and purposes, the skill of making and governing, and administering all things in number, weight, and measure. The knowledge of GOD rather considers things absolutely, and in themselves: the wisdom of GOD considers rather the respects and relations of things, looks upon things under the notion of means, and ends; accordingly I describe them thus: the knowledge of GOD is a perfect comprehension of the nature of all things, with all their qualities, powers, and circumstances. The wisdom of GOD is a perfect comprehension of the respects and relations of things one to another; of their harmony and opposition, their fitness and unfitness to such and such ends. I have largely spoken to the first of these: I come now to the

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Second, the wisdom of GOD in general; together with his majesty and sovereignty, as they are here joined together. I begin with the

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First,

First, that "God is the only wise God." In handling of this, I shall shew,

1. In what sense God may be said to be the "only wise God."

2. Prove that this attribute belongs to God.

1. In what sense God may be said to be "the only wise God." For answer to this, we may take notice, that there are some perfections of God that are incommunicable to the creatures; as, his independency and eternity. These God only possesseth, and they are to be attributed to him alone; God only is independent and eternal: but there are other perfections which are communicable, that is, which the creatures may, in some measure and degree, partake of, as knowledge, and wisdom, and goodness, and justice, and power, and the like; yet these the scriptures do peculiarly attribute to God; not that they are altogether incommunicable to the creature, but that they belong to God in such a peculiar and divine manner, as doth shut out the creature from any claim or title to them, in that degree and perfection wherein God possesseth them. I shall give you some instances of this. His goodness, this is reserved to God alone, Matth. xix. 17. "Why callest thou me good? there is none good, but one, that is God:" his power and immortality, 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16. "Who is the blessed and only potentate; who only hath immortality:" his wisdom, 1 Tim. i. 17. "The only wise God:" Rom. xvi. 27. "To God only wise be glory:" his holiness, Rev. xv. 14. "For thou only art holy." The transcendent degree and singularity of these divine perfections which are communicable, is beyond what we are able to conceive: so that although the creatures partake of them, yet in that degree and perfection

tion wherein God possesseth them, they are peculiar and proper to the Deity: so that, in this sense, "there is none good but God;" he only is holy, he is the only wise: in so inconceivable a manner doth God possess even those perfections, which in some degree he communicates; and we can only understand them as he communicates them, and not as he possesseth them; so that when we consider any of these divine perfections, we must not frame notions of them contrary to what they are in the creature: but we must say, that the goodness and wisdom of God are all this which is in the creature, and much more, which I am not able to comprehend.

This being premised in general, God may be said to be only wise in these two respects.

1. As being originally and independently wise.

2. As being eminently and transcendently so.

1. God only is originally and independently wise.

He derives it from none, and all derive it from him: Rom. xi. 33, 34. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord, or who hath been his counsellor? or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him are all things, to whom be glory for ever. Amen." He challengeth any creature to come forth and say, that they have given wisdom, or any other perfection, to God: no, all creatures that are partakers of it, derive it from him: Prov. ii. 6. "For the Lord giveth wisdom." Eccl. ii. 26. "God giveth to a man that is good in his sight, wisdom, and knowledge, and joy."

Dan. ii. 21. "He giveth wisdom to the wise," and
"knowledge to them that know understanding."

2. He is eminently and transcendently so: and this follows from the former, because GOD is the fountain of wisdom, therefore it is most eminently in him: Psal. xciv. 9, 10. "He that planted the
"ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye,
"shall he not see? he that teacheth man knowledge,
"shall not he know?" In like manner we may reason concerning all other attributes of GOD, that if he communicates them, he is much more eminently possessor of them himself; the greatest wisdom of the creatures is nothing in opposition to the wisdom of GOD, nothing in comparison to it.

Nothing in opposition to it: Job v. 13. "He
"taketh the wise in their own craftiness." Job ix.
4. "He is wise in heart, and mighty in strength:
"who hath hardened himself against him, and prospered?" Prov. xxi. 30. "There is no wisdom,
"nor understanding, nor counsel, against the LORD."
1 Cor. i. 19. "He will destroy the wisdom of the
"wise;" v. 29. and by foolish things confound
"the wise."

Nothing in comparison of it. There are a great many that pretend to wisdom; but most are destitute of true wisdom; and those who have it, have it with many imperfections and disadvantages. Usually those who are destitute of true wisdom, pretend most to it, Job xi. 12. "Vain man
"would be wise, though he be born like a wild ass's
"colt." The high and the great of this world pretend to it: Job xxxii. 9. "great men are not always
"wise." Learned men, they pretend to it; the heathen philosophers were great professors of wisdom, Rom. i. 22. "Professing themselves to be wise, they
"be."

“ became fools,” they were “ wise to do evil, but
 “ to do good they had no understanding.” As
 the prophet speaks, Jeremiah iv. 22. The politi-
 cians of the world, they pretend to it; but theirs is ra-
 ther a craftiness than a wisdom. Men call it prudence;
 but they are glad to use many arts to set it off, and make
 it look like wisdom; by silence, and secrecy, and for-
 mality, and affected gravity, and nods, and gestures.
 The scripture calls it “ the wisdom of this world,”
 1 Cor. ii. 6. and a “ fleshly wisdom,” 2 Cor. i. 12. It
 is wisdom misapplied, it is the pursuit of a wrong end.
 The petty plots and designs of this world are far from
 wisdom: 1 Cor. iii. 20. “ The LORD knoweth the
 “ thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.” That
 cannot be wisdom, which mistakes it’s great end,
 which minds mean things, and neglects those which
 are of greatest concernment to them: Job xxii. 2.
 “ He that is wise, is profitable to himself.” Prov.
 ix. 12. “ If thou be wise, thou shalt be wise for thy
 “ self.” Tully tells us, Ennius was wont to say,
Ne quicquam sapere sapientem, qui sibi ipsi prodesse non
quiret. The wise sages of the world, as to the best
 things are fools, Matt. xi. 25. “ God hath hid these
 “ things from the wise and prudent.” There are
 many that are “ wise in their own conceits; but there
 “ is more hope of a fool than of them,” Prov.
 xxvi. 12. So that the greatest part of that which
 passeth for wisdom among men, is quite another
 thing. *Nihil tam valde vulgare quàm nihil sapere;*
 we talk much of prodigies, *maximum portentum vir*
sapiens, Tully. Those few in the world that are
 “ the children of true wisdom,” they have it in a
 very imperfect degree; they are not usually so wise
 for their souls, and for eternity, as men of this world,
 Luke xvi. 8. “ The children of this world are in
 “ their

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“ their generation wiser than the children of light.” It is attended with many inconveniencies, Eccl. i. 18. “ In much wisdom there is much grief;” he speaks of the wisdom about natural things.

But we need not instance in the folly of wicked men, and worldly men, and in the imperfect degrees of wisdom which are to be found in good men, in wisdom's own children; the wisdom of God needs not these foils to set it off: the wisdom of man in innocency, or of the highest angel in heaven, bears no proportion to the unerring and infinite wisdom of God. We mortal men many times mistake our end out of ignorance, and apply unfit and improper means for accomplishing good ends; the angels in glory have not a perfect comprehension of the harmony and agreement of things, of the unfitness and opposition of them one to another: but the divine wisdom propounds to itself the highest and best ends, and hath a perfect comprehension of the fitness and unfitness of all things one to another: so that angels are but foolish beings to God. Job iv. 17. “ His angels he chargeth with folly.” Job, upon a full enquiry after wisdom, concludes that it only belongs to God, that he only is perfectly possessed of it. Job xxviii. 12, &c. “ But where shall wisdom be found? and where is the place of understanding?” In such an eminent and transcendent degree it is not to be met with in any of the creatures; God only hath it, ver. 23. “ God knoweth the place thereof.”

II. I shall prove that this perfection belongs to God,

1. From the dictates of natural reason, and
 2. From Scripture.
1. From the dictates of natural reason. I have often

often told you the perfections of God are not to be proved by way of demonstration, because there is no cause of them; but by way of conviction, by shewing the absurdity and inconvenience of the contrary.

The contrary is an imperfection, and argues many other imperfections; therefore wisdom belongs to God. Among men folly is looked upon as the greatest defect; it is accounted a greater reproach and disgrace, than vice and wickedness; it is of so ill report in the world, that there are not many but had rather be accounted knaves than fools; but in a true esteem and value of things, it is, next to wickedness, the greatest imperfection; and, on the contrary, wisdom is the highest perfection next to holiness and goodness; it is usually more cried up in the world than any thing else. Reason tells us, though the scripture had not said it; that "wisdom excels folly as much as light doth darkness," Eccl. ii. 13. "The wisdom of a man maketh his face to shine," Eccl. viii. 1. "Wisdom is a defence," vii. 12. and ver. 19. "Wisdom strengthneth the wise more than ten mighty men that are in the city."

And the denial of this perfection to God would argue many other imperfections; it would be an universal blemish to the divine nature, and would darken all his other perfections. It would weaken the power of God. How impotent and ineffectual would power be without wisdom! what irregular things would it produce! what untoward combinations of effects would there be, if infinite power should act without the conduct and direction of infinite wisdom! it would eclipse the providence of God, and put out the eyes that are in the wheels, as the prophet represents God's providence. There can be no counsel, no fore-cast, no orderly government of the world

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world without wisdom. The goodness, and mercy, and justice, and truth of God, could not shine with that lustre, were it not for his wisdom, which doth illustrate these with so much advantage.

I need not bring testimonies from heathen writers to confirm this; their books are full of expressions of their admiration of God's wise government of the world. I need not trouble you with quotations of particular testimonies. Epicurus indeed denied that God either made or governed the world; but he must needs acknowledge him to have been a very wise being, because he made him happy, which cannot be without wisdom, though he had taken away all other evidence of his wisdom. Aristotle seems to have supposed the world to be a necessary result and emanation from God: but then the other sects of philosophers did suppose the world to be the free product of God's goodness and wisdom.

2. From scripture; Job ix. 4. "He is wise in heart;" xxxvi. 5. "He is mighty in strength and wisdom." Dan. ii. 20. "Blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, for wisdom and might are his." Hither we may refer those texts, which attribute wisdom to God in a singular and peculiar manner, Rom. xvi. 27. and those which speak of God as the fountain of it, who communicates and bestows it upon his creatures, Dan. ii. 21. James i. 5. and those texts which speak of the wisdom of God in the creation of the world, Psal. civ. 24. "O LORD, how wonderful are thy works, in wisdom hast thou made them all!" Jer. x. 12. "Who hath established the world by his wisdom, and stretched forth the heavens by his discretion;" in the providence and government of the world. Dan. ii. 20. "Wisdom and strength are his, and he changeth

“changeth times and seasons; he removeth kings,
“and setteth up kings:” and in many other places,
in the redemption of mankind. Therefore CHRIST
is called “the wisdom of God,” 1 Cor. i. 24. and
the dispensation of the gospel, “the hidden wisdom
“of God, and the manifold wisdom of God,”
Eph. ii. 10.

If then God be only wise, the original and only
fountain of it, from thence we learn,

First, to go to him for it, Jam. i. 5. “If any man
“lack wisdom, let him ask it of God.” There are
many conceited men, that think they are rich and
increased, and stand in need of nothing. The apo-
stle doth not speak, as if there were some that did
not want wisdom, but because there are some so
proud and conceited, that they think they lack
nothing; those are stark fools, and God resists such
foolish and proud men: but if any man, sensible of
his defect and imperfection, cometh to God, “he
“gives liberally, and upbraids no man.” We are
ashamed to learn wisdom of men, lest they should
contemn and upbraid us with our folly: men are en-
vious and unwilling that others should be as wise as
themselves; but God’s goodness makes him willing
to impart wisdom: “he gives liberally, and upbraids
“no man.”

This is the most desirable accomplishment and
perfection; “happy is the man that getteth wisdom;
“wisdom is the principal thing, therefore get wis-
“dom:” it is better than those things that are of
the highest value among men, as Solomon often
makes the comparison. Now because “it comes
“down from above,” we should look up for it;
it is by the revelation of his will, and the wise counsels
of his word, that we are made “wise unto salvati-

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“ on;” therefore we should beg of him, that “ he would give us the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of himself,” Eph. i. 17.

2. If God be only wise in such an eminent and transcendent degree, then let us be humble. There is no cause of boasting, seeing “ we have nothing but what we have received.” The lowest instance, the least specimen of divine wisdom out-shines the highest pitch of human wisdom; “ the foolishness of God is wiser than men,” 1 Cor. i. 25. therefore “ let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,” Jer. ix. 29. Of all things we should not be proud of wisdom; the proud man throws down the reputation of his wisdom, by the way that he would raise it. No such evidence of our folly, as a conceit that we are wise; *sapientis animus nunquam turgescit, nunquam tumet*, Cic. To pride our selves in our wisdom, is the way to have our folly made manifest. God threatens “ to destroy the wisdom of the wise men,” and “ to turn their wisdom into foolishness.”

3. We should labour to partake of the wisdom of God, so far as it is communicable. The greatest wisdom that we are capable of, is to distinguish between good and evil; “ to be wise to that which is good,” as the apostle speaks, Rom. xvi. 19. that is, to provide for the future in time, to make provision for eternity, to think of our latter end, to fear God and obey him, to be pure and peaceable, to receive instruction, and to win souls; these are the characters which the scripture gives of wisdom. When Job had declared, that the excellency of the divine wisdom was not to be attained by men; he tells us what that wisdom is, which is proper for us: “ and unto man he said, the fear of the LORD, that

“ is

is wisdom; and to depart from evil, that is understanding." There are many that are wise to worldly ends and purposes, as our SAVIOUR tells us; wise to get riches, and to ascend to honours: but this is not the wisdom which we are to labour after; this is but a short-witted prudence, to serve a present turn, without any prospect to the future, without regard to the next world, and the eternity which we are to live in; this is to be wise for a moment, and fools for ever.

4. If God be only wise, then put your trust and confidence in him. Whom should we trust rather than infinite wisdom, which manageth and directs infinite goodness and power? In all cases of difficulty trust him for direction, "acknowledge him in all thy ways," that he may "direct thy steps; commit thy way unto the LORD, and lean not to thine own understanding. The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong," but the providence of God disposeth all these things. And if we rely upon our own wisdom, that will prove a broken reed. And as our own wisdom is a broken reed, so the wisdom of other men, Isa. xxxi. 1, 2. God curseth them that "go down into Egypt, and trust to their strength and wisdom, but look not to the holy one of Israel, neither seek the LORD; yet he also is wise," saith the prophet.

5. Let us adore the wisdom of God, and say with St. Paul, 1 Tim. i. 17. "To the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever, Amen:" and with Daniel, "blessed be the name of God for ever and ever, for wisdom and might are his." Veneration is the acknowledgment of an infinite excellency and perfection. We reverence any extraordinary degree of wisdom in men; but the divine

wisdom, which is perfect and infinite, is matter of our adoration, and blessing, and praise. Thanksgiving respects the benefits we receive: but we bless God when we acknowledge any excellency: for as God's blessing us, is to do us good; so our blessing him, is to speak good of him: as all God's perfections are the objects of our blessing, so more especially his wisdom is of our praise; for the praise of God is to take notice of the wise design and contrivance of his goodness and mercy towards us.

Before I pass on to the other particulars contained in these words, I cannot but take notice, that this wise God, here spoken of, is stiled our SAVIOUR, which some understand of our SAVIOUR JESUS CHRIST, and bring this place as an argument to prove his divinity: and if that were so, it were all one to my purpose, which is in the next place to shew, that glory, and majesty, and dominion, and power, belong to the divine being. But although I would not willingly part with any place that may fairly be brought for the proof of the divinity of CHRIST, yet seeing there are so many plain texts in scripture for the proof of it, we have the less reason to stretch doubtful places; and that this is so, will appear to any one who considers that the title of SAVIOUR is several times in scripture attributed to God the father; besides that in a very ancient and authentick copy we find the words read somewhat otherwise, and so as to put this out of all controversy, *μόνον θεῷ σωτῆρι ἡμῶν διὰ Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν δόξα, &c.*

Having premised thus much for the clearing of these words, I shall briefly consider, first, God's glory and majesty, and then his dominion and sovereignty.

First, God's glory and majesty. By majesty, we

we may understand the greatness, or eminent excellency of the divine nature, which results from his perfections, and whereby the divine nature is set and placed infinitely above all other beings; I say, the eminent excellency of the divine nature, which results from his perfections, more especially from those great perfections, his goodness, and wisdom, and power, and holiness.

And his glory is a manifestation of this excellency, and a just acknowledgment and due opinion of it. Hence it is, that in scripture, God is said to be "glorious in power," and "glorious in holiness," and his goodness is called "his glory;" and here in the text, glory and majesty are ascribed to him upon the account of his wisdom and goodness.

That these belong to God, I shall prove,

1. From the acknowledgment of natural light. The heathens did constantly ascribe greatness to God, and that as resulting chiefly from his goodness, as appears by their frequent conjunction of these two attributes, goodness and greatness. Opt. Max. were their most familiar titles of the Deity, to which I will add that known place of Seneca, *primus deorum cultus est deos credere, dein reddere illis maiestatem suam, reddere bonitatem, sine qua nulla maiestas.*

2. From scripture. It were endless to produce all those texts wherein greatness and glory are ascribed to God. I shall mention two or three. Deut. x. 17. "the LORD is a great God;" Psal. xxiv. 10. he's called "the king of glory;" civ. 1. he is said to be "clothed with majesty and honour. The "whole earth is full of his glory." Hither belong all those doxologies in the old and new testament, wherein greatness, and glory, and majesty are ascribed to God.

From

From all which we may learn,

1. What it is that makes a person great and glorious, and what is the way to majesty, viz. "real worth and excellency," and particularly, that kind of excellency which creatures are capable of in a very eminent degree, and that is goodness; this is that which advanceth a person, and gives him a pre-eminency above all others; this casts a lustre upon a man, and "makes his face to shine." Aristotle tells us, that honour is nothing else but the "signification of the esteem which we have of a person for his goodness; for, saith he, to be good, and to do good, is the highest glory." God's goodness is his highest glory; and there is nothing so glorious in any creature, as herein to be like God.

2. Let us give God the glory which is due to his name; "ascribe ye greatness to our God," Deut. xxxii. 3. "Give unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and power," Psal. xxix. 1. The glory and majesty of God calls for our esteem and honour, our fear and reverence of him. Thus we should "glorify God in our spirits," by an inward esteem and reverence of his majesty. The thoughts of earthly majesty will compose us to reverence: how much more should the apprehensions of the divine majesty strike an awe upon our spirits in all our addresses to him? His excellency should make us afraid, and keep us from all saucy boldness and familiarity with him. Reverence is an acknowledgment of the distance which is between the majesty of God, and our meanness. And we should "glorify him in our bodies," with outward worship and adoration; that is, by all external significations of reverence and respect; and we should glorify him in our lives and actions. The highest glory a creature can give to God, is to endeavour

endeavour to be like him; *satis illos coluit, quisquis imitatus est*, Seneca. Hereby we manifest and shew forth his excellency to the world, when we endeavour to be conformed to the divine perfections. And in case of sin and provocation, we are to give glory to God by repentance, which is an acknowledgment of his holiness, who hates sin; and of his justice, which will punish it; and of the mercy of God, which is ready to pardon it; for it is the glory of God to pass by a provocation.

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3. We should take heed of robbing God of his glory, by giving it to any creature, by ascribing those titles, or that worship to any creature, which is due to God alone. This is the reason which is given of the second commandment; "I the LORD am a jealous God." God is jealous of his honour, "and will not give his glory to another, nor his praise to graven images," Isa. xlii. 8. Upon this account we find the apostle reproves the idolatry of the heathens, because thereby they debased the esteem of God, and did shew they had unworthy thoughts of him, Rom. i. 21, 23. "When they knew God, they glorified him not as God, but became vain in their imaginations: and changed the glory of the incorruptible God, into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds and four-footed beasts, and creeping things." Hereby they denied the glorious excellency of the divine nature; that is, that he is a spirit, and so incapable of being represented by any material or sensible image.

Secondly, I come now to speak of the sovereignty and dominion of God. In which I shall shew,

First, what we are to understand by the sovereignty and dominion of God. By these we mean the

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full and absolute right, and title, and authority which God hath to, and over all his creatures, and made by him. And this right results from the effects of that goodness, and power and wisdom, whereby all things are and were made; from whence there doth accrue to God a sovereign right and title to all his creatures, and a full and absolute authority over them; that is, such a right and authority, which doth not depend upon any superior, nor is subject and accountable to any, for any thing that he does to any of his creatures. And this is that which is called *summum imperium*, because there is no power above it to check or controul it, and therefore there can be none greater than this. And it is absolute, because all the creatures have what they have from God, and all depend upon his goodness, and therefore they owe all possible duty and perpetual subjection so long as they continue in being, because it is solely by his power and goodness, that they continue; and therefore whatever right or title any one can pretend to any person or thing, that God hath to all things, *in Deo omnes tituli, omnia jura concurrunt*.

So that sovereignty and dominion signifies a full right, and title, and propriety in all his creatures, and an absolute authority over them, to govern them and dispose of them, and deal with them in any way he pleaseth, that is not contrary to his essential dignity and perfection, or repugnant to the natural state and condition of the creature.

And for our better understanding of this, and the preventing of mistakes, which men are apt to fall into about the sovereignty of God, I will shew,

I. Wherein it doth not consist. And,

II. Wherein it doth consist.

I. Where-

and sovereignty of God.

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I. Wherein it doth not consist.

1. Not in a right to gratify and delight himself in the extreme misery of innocent and undeserving creatures; I say, not in a right; for the right that God hath in his creatures, is founded in the benefits he hath conferred upon them, and the obligations they have to him upon that account. Now there's none, who because he hath done a benefit, can have, by virtue of that, a right to do a greater evil than the good which he hath done amounts to; and I think it next to madness, to doubt whether extreme and eternal misery be not a greater evil, than simple being is a good. I know they call it physical goodness; but I do not understand how any thing is the better for being called by a hard name. For what can there be that is good or desirable in being, when it only serves to be a foundation of the greatest and most lasting misery? and we may safely say, that the just God will never challenge more than an equitable right. God doth not claim any such sovereignty to himself, as to crush and oppress innocent creatures without a cause, and to make them miserable without a provocation. And because it seems some have been very apt to entertain such groundless jealousies and unworthy thoughts of God, he hath given us his oath to assure us of the contrary. "As I live, saith the LORD, I have no pleasure in the death of a sinner, but rather that he should turn and live." So far is he from taking pleasure in the misery and ruin of innocent creatures, that in case of sin and provocation, he would be much rather pleased, if sinners would, by repentance, avoid and escape his justice, than that they should fall under it. The good God cannot be glorified or pleased in doing evil to any, where justice doth not re-

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quire it; nothing is further from infinite goodness, than to rejoice in evil. We account him a tyrant and a monster of men, and of a devilish temper, that can do so; and we cannot do a greater injury to the good God, than to paint him out after such a horrid and deformed manner.

2. The sovereignty of God doth not consist in imposing laws upon his creatures, which are impossible either to be understood or observed by them. For this would not only be contrary to the dignity of the divine nature, but contradict the nature of a reasonable creature, which, in reason, cannot be obliged by any power to impossibilities.

3. The sovereignty of God doth not consist in a liberty to tempt men to evil, or by any inevitable decree to necessitate them to sin, or effectually to procure the sins of men, and to punish them for them. For as this would be contrary to the holiness, and justice, and goodness of God; so to the nature of a reasonable creature, who cannot be guilty or deserve punishment for what it cannot help. And men cannot easily have a blacker thought of God, than to imagine that he hath, from all eternity, carried on a secret design to circumvent the greatest part of men into destruction, and underhand to draw men into a plot against heaven, that by this unworthy practice he may raise a revenue of glory to his justice. There's no generous and good man, but would spit in that man's face, that should charge him with such a design; and if they who are but very drops of goodness, in comparison of God, the infinite ocean of goodness, would take it for such a reproach, shall we attribute that to the best being in the world, which we would detest and abominate in our selves?

II. Wherein

II. Wherein the sovereignty of God doth consist.

1. In a right to dispose of, and deal with his creatures in any way that doth not contradict the essential perfections of God, and the natural condition of the creature.

2. In a right to impose what laws he pleaseth upon his creatures, whether natural and reasonable; positive, of trial of obedience, provided they contradict not the nature of God, or of the creature.

3. In a right to inflict due and deserved punishment in a case of provocation.

4. In a right to afflict any of his creatures, so the evil he inflicts be short of the benefits he hath conferred on them; yea, and farther, in a right when he pleaseth to annihilate the creature, and turn it out of being, if it should so seem good to him, though that creature have not offended him; because what he gave was his own, and he may without injury take it away again when he pleaseth. In these the sovereignty of God consists; and if there be anything else that can be reconciled with the essential perfections of God.

Secondly, for the proof and confirmation of this. This is universally acknowledged by the heathens, that God is "the LORD and sovereign of the world, and of all creatures." Hence Plato calls him *τῶν πάντων ἡγεμόνα*; and Tully, *omnium rerum Dominum*, LORD of all; and this the scripture doth every where attribute to him, calling him, "LORD of all; KING of kings, and LORD of lords;" to which we may refer all those doxologies, in which power, and dominion, and authority are ascribed to God. I will only mention that eminent confession of Nebuchadnezzar, a great king, who, when his understanding came to him, was forced to acknowledge,

knowledge, that "God was the most High,"
Dan. iv. 34, 35. I infer,

First, negatively, we cannot, from the sovereignty of God, infer a right to do any thing that is unsuitable to the perfection of his nature; and consequently that we are to rest satisfied with such a notion of dominion and sovereignty in God, as doth not plainly and directly contradict all the notions that we have of justice and goodness: nay, it would be little less than a horrid and dreadful blasphemy, to say that God can, out of his sovereign will and pleasure, do any thing that contradicts the nature of God, and the essential perfections of the Deity; or to imagin that the pleasure and will of the holy, and just, and good God, is not always regulated and determined by the essential and indispensable laws of goodness, and holiness, and righteousness.

Secondly, positively; we may infer from the sovereignty and dominion of God,

1. That we ought to own and acknowledge God for our LORD and sovereign, who by creating us, and giving us all that we have, did create to himself a right in us.

2. That we owe to him the utmost possibility of our love, "to love him with all our hearts, and souls, and strength;" because the souls that we have, he gave us; and that we are in a capacity to love him, is his gift; and when we render these to him, we do but give him of his own.

3. We owe to him all imaginable subjection, and observance, and obedience; and are with all diligence, to the utmost of our endeavours, to conform our selves to his will, and to those laws which he hath imposed upon us.

4. In case of offence and disobedience, we are, SERM.
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without murmuring, to submit to what he shall inflict upon us, “to accept of the punishment of our iniquity,” and “patiently to bear the indignation of the LORD,” because we have sinned against him, who is our LORD and sovereign.

SERMON CXXXVII.

The wisdom of God in the creation of the world.

PSALM civ. 24.

*O LORD, how manifold are thy works ! in wisdom
hast thou made them all.*

I AM treating of the attributes and properties of SERM.
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God, particularly those which relate to the divine understanding, which I told you are his knowledge and wisdom. I have finished the first, the knowledge of God. The last day I spake, concerning the wisdom of God in general ; but there are three eminent arguments, and famous instances of God’s wisdom, which I have reserved for a more large and particular handling. The wisdom of God shines forth in the creation of the world, in the government of it, and in the redemption of mankind by JESUS CHRIST. Of these three I shall speak severally.

I begin with the first, the argument of God’s wisdom, which the creation doth furnish us withal. In this visible frame of the world which we behold
with

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with our eyes, which way soever we look, we are encountred with ocular demonstrations of the wisdom of God. What the apostle saith of the power of God is true likewise of his wisdom, Rom. i. 20. "The invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and godhead:" so the eternal wisdom of God is understood "by the things which are made." Now the creation is an argument of the wisdom of God, as it is an effect of admirable counsel and wisdom. As any curious work, or rare engine doth argue the wit of the artificer; so the variety, and order, and regularity, and fitness of the works of God, argue the infinite wisdom of him who made them; a work so beautiful and magnificent, such a stately pile as heaven and earth is, so curious in the several pieces of it, so harmonious in all it's parts, every part so fitted to the service of the whole, and each part for the service of another; is not this a plain argument that there was infinite wisdom in the contrivance of this frame?

Now I shall endeavour to prove to you, that this frame of things which we see with our eyes, which we call the world, or the creation, is contrived after the best manner, and hath upon it evident impressions of counsel and wisdom. I grant the wisdom of God is infinite, and that many of the ends and designs of his wisdom are "unsearchable, and past finding out," both in the works of creation and providence; and that "though a wise man seek to find out the work of God from the beginning to the end, he shall not be able to do it;" and we shall never be able to exhaust all the various wisdom and contrivance which is in the works of God;

God; though the oftener, and the nearer we meditate upon them, the more we shall see to admire in them; the more we study this book of the creation, the more we shall be astonished at the wisdom of the author: but this doth not hinder, but that we may discover something of the wisdom of God, though it be infinite. As the effects of infinite power may fall under our senses, so the designs of infinite wisdom may fall under our reason and understanding; and when things appear to our best reason plainly to be ordered for the best, and the greatest advantages of the world and mankind, so far as we are able to judge; and if they had been otherwise, as they might have been a hundred thousand ways, they would not have been so well; we ought to conclude, that things are thus, and not otherwise, is the result of wisdom.

Now the wisdom of God in the creation will appear by considering the works of God. Those who have studied nature, can discourse these things more exactly and particularly. It would require perfect skill in astronomy, to declare the motions and order of heavenly bodies; and in anatomy, to read lectures of the rare contrivance of the bodies of living creatures. But this, as it is beyond my ability, so it would probably be above most of your capacities; therefore I shall content myself with some general and more obvious instances of the divine wisdom, which shine forth so clear in his works, that "he that runs may read it."

1. I shall take a short survey of the several parts of the world.

2. Single out man, the master-piece of the visible Creation.

1. If we survey the world, and travel over the several parts of it in our thoughts, we shall find that all

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all things in it are made with the greatest exactness, ranged in the most beautiful order, and serve the wisest and best ends.

If we look up to heaven, and take notice only there of what is most visible, the sun, you see how by the wise order and constancy of it's course it makes day and night, winter and summer. This the psalmist takes notice of, Psal. xix. 1, 2. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy work. Day unto day uttereth speech; and night unto night sheweth knowledge." It may easily be imagined many ways, how the sun might have had another course in reference to the earth; but no man can devise any other, that should not be very much to the prejudice of the world; so that this being the best, it is an argument that wisdom had the ordering and disposing of it.

If we look down to the earth, we shall see gods ascending and descending; I mean clear representations of divine wisdom in the treasures that are hid in the bowels of it, and those fruits that grow upon the surface of it. What vast heaps, and what variety of useful materials and minerals are scattered up and down in the earth, as one would think with a careless hand, but yet so wisely dispersed, as is most proper for the necessities and uses of several countries! Look upon the surface of the earth, and you shall find it clothed and adorned with plants of various and admirable frame, and beauty, and usefulness. Look upon the vast ocean, and there you may see the wisdom of God in bridling and restraining that unruly element, I mean, in sinking it below the earth; whereas the water might have been above and covered the earth, and then the earth had been in a great measure

measure useless, and incapable of those inhabitants which now possess it.

Look again upon the earth, and in the air, and sea, and you shall find all these inhabited and furnished with great store of living creatures of several kinds, wonderfully made in the frame of their bodies, endowed with strong inclination to increase their kinds, and with a natural affection and care towards their young ones; and every kind of these creatures armed either with strength or wit to oppose their enemy, or swiftness to fly from him, or strong holds to secure themselves. But the creation is a vast field, in which we may easily lose ourselves. I shall therefore call home our wandering thoughts; for we need not go out of ourselves for a proof of divine wisdom. I shall therefore,

2. Select the choicest piece of it, man, who is the top and perfection of this visible world. What is said of the elephant, or behemoth, Job xl. 19. in respect of the vast bigness and strength of his body, is only absolutely true of man, that he is *divini opificii caput*, "the chief of the works of God, and upon earth there is none like him." Man is *mundi utriusque nexus*, "the bond of both worlds," as Scaliger calls him, in whom the world of bodies, and the world of spirits do meet, and unite; for in respect to his body, he is related to this visible world, and is of the earth; but in respect of his soul, he is allied to heaven, and descended from above. We have looked above us, and beneath us, and about us, upon the several representations of God's wisdom, and the several parts of the creation; but we have not yet considered the best piece of the visible world, which we may speak of, without flattery of ourselves, and to the praise of our Maker. God, when he had

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made the world, " he made man after his own image." When he had finished the other part of the creation, he was pleased to set up this picture of himself in it, as a memorial of the workman. Now we shall a little more particularly consider this piece of God's workmanship, being it is better known and more familiar to us, as it is more excellent than the rest, and consequently a higher instance of the divine wisdom. It is observed by some, that concerning the parts of the creation, God speaks the word, " let there be light," and " let there be a firmament, and there was so:" but when he comes to make man, he doth, as it were, deliberate, and enter into consultation about him; " And God said, " let us make man in our image, after our likeness; " and let him have dominion," Gen. i. 26; as if man, above all the rest, were the effect and result of divine wisdom, and the creature of his counsel.

Man may be considered either in himself, and in respect of the parts of which he consists, soul and body; or with relation to the universe, and other parts of the creation.

1. Consider him in himself, as compounded of soul and body. Consider man in his outward and worse part, and you shall find that to be admirable, even to astonishment; in respect of which, the psalmist cries out, Psal. cxxxix. 14. " I am fearfully and " wonderfully made; marvellous are thy works, " and that my soul knoweth right well." The frame of our bodies is so curiously wrought, and every part of it so full of miracle, that Galen, (who was otherwise backward enough to the belief of a God) when he had anatomized man's body, and carefully surveyed the frame of it, viewed the fitness and usefulness of every part of it, and the many several intentions

tions of every little vein, and bone, and muscle, and the beauty of the whole; he fell into a pang of devotion, and wrote a hymn to his Creator. And those excellent books of his, *de usu partium*, “ of the usefulness and convenient contrivance of every part of the body,” are a most exact demonstration of the divine wisdom, which appears in the make of our body; of which books, Gassendus saith, the whole work is writ with a kind of enthusiasm. The wisdom of God, in the frame of our bodies, very much appears by a curious consideration of the several parts of it; but that requiring a very accurate skill in anatomy, I chuse rather wholly to forbear it, than by my unskilfulness to be injurious to the divine wisdom.

But this *domicilium corporis*, “ the house of our body,” though it be indeed a curious piece; yet it is nothing to the noble inhabitant that dwells in it. This cabinet, though it be exquisitely wrought, and very rich; yet it comes infinitely short in value of the jewel that is hid and laid up in it. How does the glorious faculty of reason and understanding exalt us above the rest of the creatures! Nature hath not made that particular provision for man, which it hath made for other creatures, because it hath provided for him in general, in giving him a mind and reason. Man is not born clothed, nor armed with any considerable weapon for defence; but he hath reason and understanding to provide these things for himself; and this alone excels all the advantages of other creatures: he can keep himself warmer and safer; he can foresee dangers and provide against them; he can provide weapons that are better than horns, and teeth, and paws, and by the advantage of his reason, is too hard for all other creatures, and can defend himself against their violence.

many arguments of divinity are there in it! That there should be at once in our understandings distinct comprehensions of such variety of objects; that it should pass in it's thoughts from heaven to earth in a moment, and retain the memory of things past, and take a prospect of the future, and look forward as far as eternity! Because we are familiar to our selves, we cannot be strange and wonderful to our selves; but the great miracle of the world is the mind of man, and the contrivance of it an eminent instance of God's wisdom.

2. Consider man with relation to the universe, and you shall find the wisdom of God doth appear, in that all things are made so useful for man, who was designed to be the chief inhabitant of this visible world, the guest whom God designed principally to entertain in this house which he built. Not that we are to think, that God hath so made all things for man, that he hath not made them at all for himself, and possibly for many other uses than we can imagine; for we much over-value our selves, if we think them to be only for us; and we diminish the wisdom of God, in restraining it to one end: but the chief and principal end of many things is the use and service of man; and in reference to this end, you shall find that God hath made abundant and wise provision.

More particularly we will consider man,

1. In his natural capacity, as a part of the world. How many things are there in the world for the service and pleasure, for the use and delight of man, which, if man were not in the world, would be of little use? Man is by nature a contemplative creature, and God has furnished him with many objects to exercise

...cise his understanding upon, which would be so
...r usefess and lost, if man were not. Who should
...serve the motions of the stars, and the courses of
...ose heavenly bodies, and all the wonders of na-
...re? Who should pry into the secret virtues of
...lants, and other natural things, if there were not
...the world a creature endowed with reason and un-
...derstanding? Would the beasts of the field study as-
...tronomy, or turn chymists, and try experiments in
...ature?

What variety of beautiful plants and flowers is
...here! which can be imagined to be of little other
...se but for the pleasure of man. And if man had
...ot been, they would have lost their grace, and been
...rod down by the beasts of the field, without pity
...or observation; they would not have made them
...nto garlands and nose-gays. How many sorts of
...ruits are there which grow upon high trees, out of
...he reach of beasts! and indeed they take no pleasure
...n them. What would all the vast bodies of trees
...have served for, if man had not been to build with
...them, and make dwellings of them? Of what use
...would all the mines of metal have been, and of coal,
...and the quarries of stone? Would the mole have ad-
...mired the fine gold? Would the beasts of the forest
...have built themselves palaces, or would they have
...made fires in their dens?

2. Consider man in his geographical capacity, as
...I may call it, in relation to his habitation in this or
...that climate or country. The wisdom of God hath
...so ordered things, that the necessities of every coun-
...try are supplied one way or other. Egypt hath no
...rains: but the river Nilus overflows it, and makes
...it fruitful. Under the line, where there are exces-
...sive heats, every day there are constant gales and
...breezes

breezes of cool wind, to fan and refresh the scorched inhabitants. The hotter countries are furnished with materials for silk, a light clothing; we that are cooler here in England, with materials for cloth; a warmer clothing; Russia and Muscovy, which are extreme cold, are provided with warm furs, and skins of beasts.

3. Consider man in his capacity of commerce and intercourse. Man is a sociable creature; besides the advantages of commerce with remoter nations, for supplying every country with those conveniences and commodities, which each doth peculiarly afford. And here the wisdom of God does plainly appear in disposing the sea into several parts of the world for the more speedy commerce and intercourse of several nations. Now if every country had brought forth all commodities, that had been needless and superfluous, because they might have been had without commerce; besides, that the great encouragement of intercourse among nations, which is so agreeable to human nature, would have been taken away if every country had been, as now it is, destitute of many things other countries have, and there had been no sea to give an opportunity of traffick; the world had been very defective as to the use of man. Now here appears the wisdom of God, that the world, and all things in it, are contrived for the best.

Thus I have endeavoured to do something towards the displaying of God's wisdom in the workmanship of the world; although I am very sensible how much I have been mastered and oppressed by the greatness and weight of so noble an argument. For "who can declare the works of God! and who can shew forth all his praise!"

The use I shall make of what has been said, shall be in three particulars.

1. This

I. This confutes the Epicureans, who impute the world, and this orderly and beautiful frame of things to chance. Those things which are the proper effects of counsel, and bear the plain impression of wisdom upon them, ought not to be attributed to chance. What a madness is it to grant all things to be as well made, as if the wisest agent upon counsel and design had contrived them; and yet to ascribe them to chance! Now he that denies things to be so wisely framed, must pick holes in the creation, and shew some fault and irregularity in the frame of things, which no man ever yet pretended to do. Did ever any anatomist pretend to shew how the body of man might have been better contrived, and fitter for the uses of a reasonable creature than it is; or any astronomer to rectify the course of the sun? As for the extravagant and blasphemous speech of Alphonfus, "that if he had stood at God's elbow when he made the world, he could have told him how to have made it better;" besides his pride, it shews nothing but his ignorance; that he built his astronomy upon a false hypothesis, as is generally believed now by the learned in that science; and no wonder he found fault with the world, when he mistook the frame of it: but those who have been most versed in nature, and have most pried into the secrets of it, have most admired the workmanship both of the great world, and the less.

But if we must suppose the world to be as well made as wisdom could contrive it, which is generally granted; it is a monstrous folly to impute it to chance. A man might better say, Archimedes did not make any of his engines by skill, but by chance; and might more easily maintain, that cardinal Richelieu did not manage affairs by any arts or policy, but

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but they fell out by mere chance. What pitif
 shifts is Epicurus put to, when the best account he
 can give of the world, is this ; “ that matter always
 “ was, and the parts of it in motion, and after
 “ great many trials, the parts of matter at length
 “ hampered themselves in this fortunate order where
 “ in they now are ; that men, at first, grew out of
 “ the earth, were nourished by the navel-string, and
 “ when they were strong enough, broke loose and
 “ weaned themselves ; that the nostrils were made
 “ by the waters making themselves a passage out
 “ of the body ; and the stomach and bowels by the
 “ waters forcing a passage downward ; that the
 “ members of the body were not made for those
 “ uses for which they serve, but chanced to be so
 “ and the uses afterwards found out.” Is it worth
 the while to advance such senseless opinions as these,
 to deny the wisdom of God ? Is it not much easier,
 and more reasonable to say, that the wisdom of God
 made all these things, than to trouble our selves to
 imagin how all things should happen thus conve-
 niently by chance ? Did you ever know any great
 work, in which there was variety of parts, and an
 orderly disposition of them required, done by chance,
 and without the direction of wisdom and counsel ?
 How long time might a man take to jumble a set of
 four and twenty letters together, before they would
 fall out to be an exact poem ; yea, or to make a book
 of tolerable sense, though but in prose ? How long
 might a man sprinkle oil and colours upon canvas
 with a careless hand, before this would produce
 the exact picture of a man ? And is a man easier
 made by chance, than his picture ? He that tells me
 that this great and curious frame of the world was
 made by chance, I could much more believe him

he should tell me that Henry the VII.'s chapel at Westminster was not built by any mortal man, that the stones did grow in those forms into which they seem to us to be cut and graven; that the stones, and timber, and iron, and brass, and all the other materials came thither by chance, and upon a day met all happily together, and put themselves into that delicate order, in which we see them so close compacted, that it must be a great chance that parts them again. Now, is it not much easier to imagine how a skilful workman should raise a building, than how timber, and stones, and how that variety of materials which is required to a great and stately building, should meet together all of a just likeness, and exactly fitted, and by chance take their places, and range themselves into that order? I insist the longer upon this, because I am sensible how much atheism hath gained in this age.

2. Let us admire, and adore, and praise the wisdom of God, "who hath established the world by his wisdom, and stretched out the heavens by his understanding; who hath made all things in number, weight, and measure;" that is, by exact wisdom. The wise works of God are the proper object of our praise; and this is a day proper for the work of praise and thanksgiving. Now under the gospel, since CHRIST was clearly revealed, we have new matter of praise and thanksgiving; but as God has given us CHRIST, so he hath given us our beings. We are not so to remember our redeemer, as to forget our creator. The goodness, and power, and wisdom of God, which appears in the creation of the world, ought still to be matter of admiration and praise to christians. It is a great fault and neglect among christians, that they are not

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more taken up with the works of God, and the contemplation of the wisdom which shines forth in them. We are apt enough to admire other things, little toys; but we overlook this vast curious engine of the world, and the great artificer of all things. It was truly said by one, that most men are so stupid and inconsiderate, as to admire the works of a painter or a carver, more than the works of God. There are many that have bestowed more eloquence in the praise of a curious picture, or an exact building, than ever they did upon this noble and exquisite frame of the world, or any of the other works of God. We can admire the wisdom, and design, and skill of petty artists, and little engineers; but here is wisdom in the beauty and order of the creation. Did we love God, and take pleasure in the effects of his wisdom and power, we should be more in the contemplation of them. Psal. cxi. 2. "The works of the LORD are great, sought out of all them that have pleasure therein." Let us then say with the Psalmist; "O LORD, how manifold are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all; the earth is full of thy riches, &c.

More particularly let us, with an humble thankfulness, admire the wisdom which hath made and disposed all things so fitly for our use and service, and with so merciful a respect to us: the light and influence of heaven; the beasts and the fruits of the earth. We find the Psalmist often praising God upon this account, Psal. cxxxvi. 4, 5, &c. The wisdom which hath framed these bodies of ours. Psal. cxxxix. 14, 15, 16. which hath endowed us with knowledge and understanding. Elihu complains, that men were apt to overlook these great blessings of God. Job xxxv. 10, 11, 12. "But none saith, where is God" "my

my maker, who giveth songs in the night? who teacheth us more than the beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the fowls of heaven? There they cry, but none giveth answer, because of the pride of evil men."

3. Use. Trust the wisdom of God, which made the world, to govern it, and the affairs of it; and the wisdom which hath framed thy body in so curious and exquisite a manner, and formed thy spirit within thee, and hath made so many creatures, with reference to thy necessity and comfort, trust him for thy future provision. Mat. vi. 25. "I say unto you, take no thought for your lives, what ye shall eat, &c. Is not the life more than meat? and the body than rayment?" He hath given us our souls, he hath breathed into us the breath of life, and made these bodies without our care and thought; he hath done the greater, will he not do the less? When thou art ready anxiously and solicitously to say, what shall I do for the necessities of life? Consider whence thou didst receive thy life, who made this body of thine; thou mayest be assured, that the wisdom which hath created these, considered how to supply them; the wisdom of God knew that you would want all these, and hath accordingly provided for them, therefore fear not.

S E R M O N CXXXVIII.

The wisdom of God in his providence.

I P E T E R v. 7.

*Casting all your care upon him, for he careth for you.*S E R M.
cxxxviii.Preached
at Ken-
sington.

AMONGST the several duties which, towards the conclusion of this epistle, the apostle exhorts christians to, this is one, not to be over-much solicitous and concerned about what may befall us, but to refer ourselves to the providence of God, which takes care of us. In speaking to this argument, I shall

I. Consider the nature of the duty here required, which is “to cast our care upon God.”

II. The argument used to persuade us to it: because “he careth for us.”

I. For the nature of the duty here required. The word *μέριμνα* signifies an anxious care about events, a care that is accompanied with trouble and disquiet of mind about what may befall us; about the good that we hope for and desire, or about the evil which we fear may come upon us. This the apostle exhorts us to throw off; and to leave to the providence of God, and his care, all those events which we are apt to be so solicitous and disquieted about. The expression seems to be taken out of Psal. ly. 22. “cast thy burthen upon the LORD, and he shall sustain thee.”

Now that we may not mistake our duty in this matter, I shall shew what is not here meant by “casting all our care upon God;” and then, what is meant by it.

The

The apostle doth not here intend to take men off from a provident care and diligence about the concerns of this life; this is not only contrary to reason, but to many express precepts and passages of scripture, wherein diligence is recommended to us, and the blessing of God, and the good success of our affairs promised thereto; wherein we are commanded to provide for those of our family, which cannot be done without some sort of care; and wherein slothfulness and negligence are condemned, and threatened with poverty; so that this is not "to cast our care upon God," to take no care of ourselves, to use no diligence and endeavour for the obtaining of the good which we desire, and the prevention of the evil we fear; this is to tempt the providence of God, and to cast that burthen upon him, which he expects we should bear our selves.

But by "casting our care upon God," the apostle intends these two things.

1. That after all prudent care and diligence have been used by us, we should not be farther solicitous, nor trouble our selves about the event of things, which, when we have done all we can, will be out of our power. And this certainly is our SAVIOUR'S meaning, when he bids us "take no care for the morrow." When we have done what is fit for us for the present to do, we should not disquiet and torment ourselves about the issue and event of things.

2. "Casting our care upon God," implies, that we should refer the issue of things to his providence, which is continually vigilant over us, and knows how to dispose all things to the best; entirely confiding in his wisdom and goodness, that he will order all things for our good; and in that confidence resolving to rest satisfied and contented with the disposals of his providence, whatever they be.

You

You see then the nature of the duty which the apostle here exhorts to, viz. That after all prudent care and diligence have been used on our parts, we should not be disquieted in our minds about the event of things, but leave them to God, who hath the care of us, and all our concernments. Which is the

II. Thing I proposed to speak to, and which I intend chiefly to insist upon, viz. The argument which the apostle here useth to persuade us to this duty, of "casting all our care upon God," because "it is he that careth for us:" and this implies in it these two things.

1. In general, that the providence of God governs the world, and concerns itself in the affairs of men, and disposeth of all events that happen to us.

2. More particularly, that this providence is peculiarly concerned for good men, and that he takes a special care of them and their concerns; "He careth for you." The apostle speaks this to them, not only as men, but as Christians. And thus the psalmist, from whom these words seem to be taken, does apply and limit this promise; "Cast thy burden then upon the Lord, and he shall sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

1. That God taketh care of us, implies in general, that the providence of God governs the world, and concerns itself in the affairs of men, and disposeth of all events that happen to us. I shall not now enter upon a large proof of the providence of God; that is too large and intricate an argument for a short discourse, and hath a great deal of nicety and difficulty in it; and though it be a fundamental principle of religion, and hath been almost generally entertained and believed by mankind, and that upon very good reason;

reason; yet because the vindication of many particular appearances of providence, does in a great measure depend upon a full view and comprehension of the whole design, therefore we must necessarily refer our selves, for full satisfaction, as to several difficulties and objections, to the other world, when we shall see God's works, together with the relation of every part to the whole design, and then many particular passages, which may now seem odd and crooked, as we look upon them by themselves, will, in relation to the whole, appear to have a great deal of reason and regularity in them.

Therefore I shall at present only briefly, and in the general, shew that it is very credible, that there is a wise providence that governs the world, and interests itself in the affairs of men, and disposeth of all events which happen to us.

And I desire it may be observed in the entrance upon this argument, that the handling of this question concerning providence, doth suppose the being of God, and that "he made the world," as principles already known and granted, before we come to dispute of his providence; for it would be vain to argue about the providence of God, with those who question his being, and whether "the world was made by him." But supposing these two principles, "that God is," and "that he made the world," it is very credible that he should take care of the government of it, and especially of one of the noblest parts of it, the race of mankind. For we cannot believe, that he, who employed so much power and wisdom in the raising of this great and magnificent pile, and furnishing every part of it with such variety of creatures, so exquisitely and so wisely fitted for the use and service of one another, should

so soon as he had perfected it, forsake his own workmanship, and take no farther care of it; especially considering that it is no trouble and disquiet to him, either to take notice of what is done here below, or to interpose for the regulating of any disorders that may happen; for infinite knowledge, and wisdom, and power can do all things with all imaginable ease, knows all things, and can do all things, without any disturbance of it's own happiness.

And this hath always been the common apprehension of mankind, that God knows all things, and observes every thing that is done in the world, and when he pleaseth, interposes in the affairs of it. 'Tis true indeed, the Epicureans did deny that God either made the world or governs it; and therefore wise men always doubted whether they did indeed believe the being of God, or not; but being unwilling to incur the danger of so odious an opinion, they were content, for fashion sake, to own his being, provided they might take away the best and most substantial arguments for the proof of it. The rest of the philosophers owned a providence, at least a general providence, that took care of great and more important matters, but did not descend to a constant and particular care of every person, and every little event belonging to them, *interdum curiosus singulorum*, says Tully; now and then, when he pleases, he takes care of particular persons, and their lesser concernments; but many of them thought that God did generally neglect the smaller and more inconsiderable affairs of the world, *Dii minora negligunt neque agellos singulorum & viticulas persequuntur*, "the gods overlook smaller matters, and do not mind every man's little field and vine." Such imperfect apprehensions had they of the providence

ence of GOD. And though they would seem hereby to consult the dignity and ease of the Deity, by exempting him from the care and trouble of lesser matters, yet, in truth and reality, they cast a dishonourable reflection upon him, as if it were a burden to infinite knowledge, and power, and goodness, to take care of every thing.

But now divine revelation hath put this matter out of doubt, by assuring us of GOD's particular care of all persons and events. Our SAVIOUR tells us, that GOD's providence extends to the least and most inconsiderable creatures; "to the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven," Mat. vi. 30. "To the fowls of the air," and that to the least of them, even to the sparrows, two of which are sold for a farthing, and yet not one of them falleth to the ground without GOD," Mat. x. 29. Much more doth the providence of GOD extend to men, which are creatures far more considerable, and to the very least thing that belongs to us, "to the very hairs of our head, which are all numbred;" the lowest instance that can be thought on.

So that the light of nature owns a more general providence; and divine revelation hath rectified those imperfect apprehensions which men had about it, and hath satisfied us, that it extends itself to all particulars, and even to the least things and most inconsiderable. And this is no ways incredible, considering the infinite perfection of the divine nature, in respect of which GOD can with as much and greater ease take care of every thing, than we can do of any one thing; and the belief of this is the great foundation of religion. Men therefore pray to GOD for the good they want, and to be freed

from the evils they fear, because they believe that he always regards and hears them. Men therefore make conscience of their duty, because they believe God observes them, and will reward and punish their good and evil deeds. So that take away the providence of God, and we pull down one of the main pillars upon which religion stands; we rob our selves of one of the greatest comforts, and best refuges in the afflictions and calamities of this life, and of all our hopes of happiness in the next.

And though there be many disorders in the world, especially in the affairs of man, the most irregular and intractable piece of God's creation; yet this is far from being a sufficient objection against the providence of God, if we consider that God made man a free creature, and capable of abusing his liberty, and intends this present life for a state of trial in order to another, where men shall receive the just recompence of their actions here: and then if we consider, that many of the evils and disorders, which God permits to happen, are capable of being overruled by him to a greater good, and are made many times to serve wise and excellent purposes, and that the providence of God does sometimes visibly and remarkably interpose, for the prevention and remedy of great disorders and confusions; I say considering all this, it is no blemish to the divine providence, to permit many of those irregularities which are in the world, and suffer the fates of good and bad men to be so cross and unequal in this life. For supposing another life after this, wherein men shall come to an account, and every man shall receive the just recompence of his actions, there will then be a proper season and full opportunity of setting all things straight and no man shall have reason then, either to glory

his wickedness, or to complain of his sufferings in this world. This is the first, that God's providence governs the world, and interests itself in the affairs of men, and disposeth of all events that happen to them; and this is a very good reason, why we should cast our particular cares upon him, who hath undertaken the government of the whole.

2. The providence of God is more peculiarly concerned for good men, and he takes a more particular and especial care of them. The apostle speaks this to Christians, "cast all your care on him, for he careth for you." And this David limits in a more particular manner to good men; "cast thy burthen upon the LORD, and he will sustain thee; he shall never suffer the righteous to be moved."

The providence of God many times preserves good men from those evils which happen to others, and by a peculiar and remarkable interposition, rescues them out of those calamities which it suffers others to fall into; and God many times blesteth good men, with remarkable prosperity and success in their affairs. To which purpose there are innumerable declarations and promises in the holy scriptures, so well known, that I shall not trouble you with the recital of them.

Notwithstanding which, it cannot be denied, that good men fall into many evils, and are harassed with great afflictions in this world: but then the providence of God usually ordereth it so, that they are armed with great patience to bear them, and find great comfort and support under them, and make better use and improvement of them than others; so that one way or other they turn to their advantage. So the apostle assures us, Rom. viii. 28. "we know that all things work together for good to them

“that love God.” All the evils and afflictions, which happen to good men, conspire one way or other to the promoting of their happiness, many times in this world, to be sure they make a great addition to it in the other. So the same apostle tells us, 2 Cor. iv. 17, 18. “Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, whilst we look not,” &c. And can we say God’s providence neglects us, when he rewards our temporal sufferings with eternal glory : when through many hardships and tribulations, he at last brings us to a kingdom ? Was Joseph neglected by God, when by a great deal of hard usage, and a long imprisonment, he was raised to the highest dignity in a great kingdom ? Or rather, was not the providence of God very remarkable towards him, in making those sufferings so many steps to his glory, and the occasion of his advancement ? And is not God’s providence towards good men as kind and as remarkable, in bringing them to an infinitely better and more glorious kingdom, by tribulations and sufferings ; and making “our light afflictions, which are but for a moment, to work for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ?”

Thus you see what is implied in God’s care of us in general ; that he governs the world, and disposeth all events ; and particularly, that he is peculiarly concerned for good men, and takes a more especial care of them. Let us now see of what force this consideration is, to persuade to the duty enjoined in the text, “to cast all our care upon God ;” that is, after all prudent care and diligence hath been used on our part, not to be anxious and solicitous about the event of things, but to leave that to God. Now this

is consideration, that "God cares for us," should be an argument to us, "to cast all our care upon him," upon these two accounts :

1. Because if "God cares for us," our concerns are in the best and safest hands.

2. Because all our anxiety and solicitude will do us no good.

1. Because if "God cares for us," our concerns are in the best and safest hands, and where we should desire to have them ; infinitely safer, than under any care and conduct of our own. And this ought to be a great satisfaction to our minds, and to free us from all disquieting thoughts ; for if God undertakes the care of us, then we are sure that nothing shall happen to us, but by the disposal or permission of infinite wisdom and goodness. There are many things indeed, which to us seem chance and accident ; but in respect of God, they are providence and design ; they may appear to happen by chance, or may proceed from the ill-will and malicious intent of second causes, but they are all wisely designed ; and as they are appointed or permitted by God, they are the result of the deepest counsel, and the greatest goodness. And can we wish that we and our concerns should be in better or safer hands, than of infinite power and wisdom, in conjunction with infinite love and goodness ? And if we be careful to do our duty, and to demean our selves towards God as we ought, we may rest assured of his love and care of us ; and if we do in good earnest believe the providence of God, we cannot but think that he hath a peculiar regard to those that love and serve him, and that he will take a peculiar care of their concerns, and that he can, and will dispose them better for us, than we could manage them our selves, if we were left

to

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Put the case we had the entire ordering and disposal of our selves, what were reasonable for us to do in this case? We would surely, according to our best wisdom and judgment, do the best we could for ourselves; and when upon experience of our manifold ignorance and weakness, we had found our weightiest affairs and designs frequently to miscarry, for want of fore-sight, or power, or skill to obviate and prevent the infinite hazards and disappointments which human affairs are liable to, we should then look about us; and if we knew any person much wiser, and more powerful than ourselves, who, we believed did heartily love us, and wish well to us, we would out of kindness to ourselves, ask his counsel in our affairs, and crave his assistance; and if we could prevail with him to undertake the care of our concernments, we would commit them all to his conduct and government, in confidence of his great wisdom and good-will to us.

Now God is such an one, he loves us as well as we do ourselves, and desires our happiness as much, and knows infinitely better than we do, what means are most conducing to it, and will most effectually secure it. And every man that believes thus of God, (as every man must do, that believes there is a God, for these are the natural and essential notions which all men have of the Deity) I say, every man that believes thus of God; the first thing he would do (if he knew not already that God had voluntarily, and of his own accord, undertaken the care of him and of his affairs) would be to apply himself to God, and to beseech him with all earnestness and importunity, that he would permit him to refer his concernments

him, and be pleased to undertake the care of them; and he would, without any demur or difficulty, give up himself wholly to him, to guide and govern him, and to dispose of him as to him should seem best.

Now if God have prevented us herein, and without our desire taken this care upon himself, we ought to rejoice in it, as the greatest happiness that could possibly have befallen us; and we should, without any farther care and anxiety, using our own best diligence, and studying to please him, chearfully leave our selves in his hands, with the greatest confidence and security, that he will do all that for us which is really best; and with a firm persuasion, that that condition, and those circumstances of life, which he shall chuse for us, will be no other but the very same which we would chuse for ourselves, if we were as wise as he.

And it is so natural for men to think thus of God, that the very heathen poet had the same idea of him, and upon that ground, adviseth us to commit all our concernments to him.

*Permittes ipsis expendere numinibus, quid
Conveniat nobis, rebusque sit utile nostris;
Nam pro jucundis, aptissima quæque dabunt dii;
Charior est illis homo, quam sibi.*

Leave it, says he, to the wiser gods, to consider and determine what is fittest for thee, and most for thy advantage; and though they do not always give thee what thou desirest, and that which pleaseth the best, yet they will give that which is most fit and convenient for thee; for man is more dear to the gods, than he is to himself. Not much different from this, is the divine counsel of Solomon, Prov. iii. 5, 6.

“ Trust

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“ Trust in the LORD with all thine heart ; and lean
“ not unto thine own understanding. In all thy
“ ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy
“ paths.” It is considerable who it is that gives this
advice ; the “ wisest of the sons of men ;” and yet
he adviseth “ to trust in God for direction, and not
“ to lean to our own understandings.”

If therefore we be fully persuaded of God’s infinitely wise and good providence, we ought certainly to refer our selves to him, and perfectly to acquiesce in his disposal, and to rest satisfied in whatever he does ; and whatever condition he assigns to us, we ought to be contented with it : if we be not, we find fault with his wisdom, and reproach his goodness, and wish the government of the world in better hands.

So that a firm belief of the providence of God, as it would take away all anxiety concerning future events, so would it likewise silence all those murmurings and discontents, which are apt to arise in us, when things fall out cross to our desires, when disasters and disappointments happen to us, and the providence of God casts us into sickness, or poverty, or disgrace. This quieted David, when he was ready to break out into murmuring at the afflictions and calamities which beset him ; “ I held my peace,
“ (says he,) and spake not a word, because thou,
“ LORD, didst it.” And this likewise should keep us from fretting and vexing at instruments and second causes ; to consider that the wise providence of God over-ruleth and disposeth the actions of men, and that no harm can happen to us without his permission. This consideration restrained David’s anger, under that high provocation of Shimei, when he followed him, reproaching him and cursing him : “ let him alone, the LORD hath said unto him, curse
“ David.”

David." He considered that God's providence permitted it; and looking upon it as coming from a higher hand, this calmed his passion, and made him bear it patiently. If a man be walking in the street, and one fling water upon him, it is apt to provoke him beyond all patience; but no man is in a passion for being wet ten times as much by rain from heaven. What calamity soever befalleth us, when we consider it as coming from heaven, and ordered and permitted there, this will still and hush our passion, and make us, with Eli, to hold our peace, or only to say, "it is the LORD, let him do what seemeth him good."

We are, indeed, liable to many things in this world, which have a great deal of evil and affliction in them, to poverty, and pain, and reproach, and restraint, and the loss of our friends and near relations; and these are great afflictions, and very cross and distasteful to us; and therefore, when we are in danger of any of these, and apprehend them to be making towards us, we are apt to be anxious, and full of trouble; and when they befall us, we are prone to censure the providence of God, and to judge rashly concerning it, as if all things were not ordered by him for the best: but we should consider, that we are very ignorant and short sighted creatures, and see but a little way before us, are not able to penetrate into the designs of God, and to look to the end of his providence. We cannot (as Solomon expresseth it) "see the work of God from the beginning to the end;" whereas, if we saw the whole design of providence together, we should strangely admire the beauty and proportion of it, and should see it to be very wise and good. And that which, upon the whole matter, and in the last issue and result of things,

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is most for our good, is certainly best, how grievous soever it may seem for the present. Sicknes caused by physick, is, many times, more troublesom for the present, than the disease we take it for; but every wise man composeth himself to bear it as well as he can, because it is in order to his health; the evils and afflictions of this life are the physick, and means of cure, which the providence of God is often necessitated to make use of; and, if we did trust our selves in the hands of this great physician, we should quietly submit to all the severities of his providence, in confidence that they would "all work together for our good."

When children are under the government of parents, or the discipline of their teachers, they are apt to murmur at them, and think it very hard to be denied so many things which they desire, and to be constrained by severities to a great many things which are grievous and tedious to them: but the parents and the master know very well, that it is their ignorance and inconsiderateness which makes them to think so, and that when they come to years, and to understand themselves better, then they will acknowledge, that all that which gave them so much discontent, was really for their good, and that it was their childishness and folly, which made them to think otherwise, and that they had, in all probability, been undone had they been indulged in their humour, and permitted in every thing to have their own will; they had not wit and consideration enough, to trust the discretion of their parents and governors, and to believe that even those things which were so displeasing to them, would at last tend to their good.

There is a far greater distance between the wisdom of God and men, and we are infinitely more ignorant

ignorant and childish in respect of God, than our children are in respect of us ; and being persuaded of this, we ought to reckon, that while we are in this world, under God's care and discipline, it is necessary for our good, that we be restrained in many things, which we eagerly desire : and suffer many things that are grievous to us ; and that when we come to heaven, and are grown up to be men, and " have put away childish thoughts," and are come to understand things as they truly are, and not in a riddle, and darkness, as we now do ; then " the judgment of God will break forth as the light, and the righteousness of all his dealings " as the noon day ;" then all the riddles of providence will be clearly expounded to us, and we shall see a plain reason for all those dispensations which were so much stumbled at, and acknowledge the great wisdom and goodness of them.

You see then what reason there is to refer ourselves to the providence of God, and " to cast all our care upon him," to trust him with the administration and disposal of all our concernments, and firmly to believe, that if we love God, and be careful to please him, every thing in the issue will turn to the best for us ; and therefore we should not anxiously trouble ourselves about the events of things, but resign up ourselves to the good pleasure of him, who disposeth all things " according to the counsel of his will," entirely trusting in his goodness, and in his fatherly care of us, and affection to us ; that he will order all things for us, for the best, referring the success of all our concernments to him, " in whose hands are all the ways of the children of men," cheerfully submitting to his determination, and the declarations of his providence, in every case.

And this is a proper expression of our confidence in God's wisdom and goodness, to refer things to him before the event, and to say with the Christians, Acts xxi. 14. "The will of the LORD be done;" because this shews that we are persuaded that God will do better for us, than our own counsel and choice; and to submit to his will after the event, is likewise a great instance of our confidence in him, and that we believe that he hath done that which is best: for when God, by his providence, declares his will in any case, we should look upon it as the sentence of a wise and just judge, in which all parties concerned ought to acquiesce, and rest fully satisfied.

And this may well be expected from us Christians, who have much greater assurance of the particular providence of God, than the heathens had; and yet some of them were able to free themselves from all trouble and anxiety, from murmuring and discontent. Upon this consideration, Epictetus, (as Arian tells us) would express himself thus, "I had always rather have that which happens; because I esteem that better which God wills, than that which I should will." And again, "lift up thine eyes (says he) with confidence to God, and say, henceforth, LORD, deal with me as thou pleasest, ὁμολογῶμονῶ σοι ἰσθὲν εἶμι. I am of the same opinion with thee, just of the same mind that thou art; I refuse nothing that seems good to thee; lead me where thou wilt; clothe me with what garments thou pleasest; set me in a publick place, or keep me in a private condition; continue me in mine own country, or banish me from it; bestow wealth upon me, or leave me to conflict and struggle with poverty, which of these thou pleasest,

"est,

“ ἐστὶ ἐγὼ σοὶ ὑπὲρ πάντων τέτων πρὸς ἀνθρώπους
“ ἀπολογήσομαι. If men shall censure this provi-
“ dence towards me, and say, thou dealest hardly
“ with me; I will apologise for thee, I will under-
“ take and maintain thy cause, that what thou doest
“ is best for me.” What could a Christian say
more or better, by way of resignation of himself to
the providence of GOD? It almost transports me to
read such passages from an heathen, especially if we
consider in what condition Epictetus was; he had a
maimed and deformed body, was in the extremity
of poverty, a slave, and very cruelly and tyrannical-
ly used, so that we can hardly imagine a man in
worse and more wretched circumstances; and yet he
justifies the providence of GOD in all this, and not
only submits to his condition, but is contented with
it, and embraces it; and since GOD hath thought
it fittest and best for him, he is of the same mind,
and thinks so too. I confess, it doth not move me
to hear Seneca, who flowed with wealth, and lived at
ease, to talk magnificently, and to slight poverty
and pain, as not worthy the name of evil and trou-
ble: but to see this poor man, in the lowest con-
dition, and worst circumstances of humanity, bear
up so bravely, and with such a chearfulness and se-
renity of mind to entertain his hard fortune; and
this not out of stupidity, but from a wise sense of
the providence of GOD, and a firm persuasion of
the wisdom and goodness of all his dealings, this,
who can chuse but be affected with it, as an admi-
rable temper for a Christian, much more for a hea-
then! To which we may apply that saying of our
LORD, concerning the heathen centurion, “ Verily
“ I say unto you, I have not found so great faith,
“ no, not in Israel;” so wise, so equal, so firm a
temper

temper of mind is seldom to be found, no, nor amongst Christians. And this is a firm consideration, that if "God cares for us," we and our concerns are in the best and safest hands, and therefore we should "cast all our care upon God." The

2. Is, because all our anxiety and care will do us no good; on the contrary, it will certainly do us hurt. We may fret and vex our own spirits, and make them restless, in the contemplation of the evils and disappointments which we are afraid of, and may make our lives miserable, in the sad reflections of our own thoughts; but we cannot, by all our anxiety and care, controul the course of things, and alter the designs of providence; we cannot, by all our vexation and trouble, over-rule events, and make things happen as we would have them. And this is the argument our SAVIOUR useth to this very purpose, Mat. vi. 27. "Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit to his stature?" So that all this trouble is unreasonable, and to no purpose, because it hath no influence on the event, either to promote or hinder it. Things are governed and disposed by an higher hand, and placed out of our reach; we may deliberate, and contrive, and use our best endeavours for the effecting of our designs, but we cannot secure the event against a thousand interpositions of divine providence. which we can neither foresee, nor hinder; but yet, notwithstanding, these our endeavours are reasonable, because they are the ordinary means which God hath appointed for the procuring of good, and prevention of evil; and though they may miscarry, yet they are all we can do: but after this is done trouble and anxiety about the event is the vainest thing in the world, because it is to no purpose, nor doth at all

conduc

conduce to what we desire; "we disquiet our selves
"in vain," and we distrust God's providence and
care of us, and thereby provoke him to defeat and
disappoint us.

Let us then, by these considerations, be persuaded
to this duty, the practice whereof is of continual
and universal use in the whole course of our lives;
in all our affairs and concernments, after we have
used our best endeavours, let us sit down and be sa-
tisfied, and refer the rest to God, whose providence
governs the world, and takes care of all our interests,
and of the interest of his church and religion, when
they seem to be in greatest danger.

We cannot but be convinced that this is very rea-
sonable, to leave the management of things to him
who made them, and therefore understands best how
to order them. The government of the world is a
very curious and complicate thing, and not to be
tampered with by every unskilful hand; and there-
fore, as an unskilful man, after he hath tampered a
great while with a watch, thinking to bring it into
better order, and is at last convinced that he can do
no good upon it, carries it to him that made it, to
mend it, and put it into order; so must we do, af-
ter all our care and anxiety about our own private
concernments, or the publick state of things, we
must give over governing the world, as a business
past our skill, as a province too hard, and "a know-
ledge too wonderful for us," and leave it to him,
who made the world, to govern it, and take care
of it.

And if we be not thus affected and disposed, we
do not believe the providence of God, whatever
profession we make of it; if we did, it would have
an influence upon our minds, to free us from anxious
care

care and discontent. Were we firmly persuaded of the wisdom and goodness of the divine providence, we should confidently rely upon it, and, according to the apostle's advice here in the text, "cast all our care upon him, because he careth for us."

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The wisdom of GOD in the redemption of mankind.

I C O R. i. 24.

—CHRIST, *the power of GOD, and the wisdom of GOD.*

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I Have, in the ordinary course of my preaching, been treating of the attributes and perfections of GOD, more particularly those which relate to the divine understanding; the knowledge and wisdom of GOD. The first of these I have finished; and made some progress in the second, the wisdom of GOD: which I have spoken to in general, and have propounded more particularly to consider those famous instances and arguments of the divine wisdom in the creation of the world; the government of it; and the "redemption of mankind by JESUS CHRIST." The two first of these I have spoken to, namely the wisdom of GOD, which appears in the creation and government of the world. I come now to the
III. Instance of the divine wisdom, "the redemption of mankind by JESUS CHRIST;" which

shall, by GOD's assistance, speak to from these words, "CHRIST the wisdom of God."

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The apostle, in the beginning of this epistle, upon occasion of his mentioning the divisions and parties that were among the Corinthians, where one said, "I am of Paul;" another, "I am of Apollos;" asks them, whether "Paul was crucified for them?" or, whether "they were baptized in the name of Paul?" To convince them that they could not pretend this, that they were baptized into his name, he tells them, at the 14th and 15th verses, that "he had not so much as baptized any of them, except two or three;" so far was he from having baptized them into his own name; and at the 17th verse, he says, that his work, his principal work, was "to preach the gospel," which he had done, not with human eloquence, "not in wisdom of words," but with great plainness and simplicity, "lest the cross of CHRIST should be made of none effect;" lest, if he should have used any artifice, the gospel should have been less powerful. And, indeed, his preaching was unaffectedly plain, and therefore the gospel did seem to very many to be a foolish and ridiculous thing. The story which they told of CHRIST crucified, was "to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness." The Jews, who expected another kind of Messias, that should come in great pomp and glory, to be a mighty temporal prince, were angry at the story of, "a crucified CHRIST." The Greeks, the philosophers, who expected some curious theories, adorned with eloquence, and delivered and laid down according to the exact rules of art, derided this plain and simple relation of CHRIST, and of the gospel.

But though this design of the gospel appeared fit-

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ly and foolish to rash and inconsiderate and prejudiced minds; yet "to them that are called," to them that do believe, "both Jews and Gentiles, CHRIST, "the power of God, and the wisdom of God;" CHRIST, that is, the way of our redemption by JESUS CHRIST, which the apostle preached, "the "wisdom of God," an eminent instance of it.

So that the "redemption of man by JESUS "CHRIST" is a design of admirable wisdom. This I shall endeavour to confirm to you,

I. By general testimonies of scripture. And,

II. By a more particular enquiry into the nature of this design, and the means how it is accomplished.

I. By testimonies from scripture. You know I have all along, in my discourses of the attributes of God, used this method of proving them, from the dictates of natural light, and the revelation of scripture: but now I must forsake my wonted method, for here the light of nature leaves me. The wisdom of the creation is manifest in "the things "which are made; the heavens declare the glory "of God's wisdom, and the firmament shews his "handy-work." The works of God do preach and set forth the wisdom of the creator; but the sun, moon, and stars, do not preach the gospel. The wisdom of redemption is "wisdom in a mystery, "hidden wisdom, which none of the princes or philosophers of this world knew." The sharpest wits, and the highest and most raised understandings amongst the heathens, could say nothing of this. Here "the "wisdom of the wise," and the understanding of "the prudent" is posed, and we may make the apostle's challenge, ver. 20. of this chapter, "Where "is the wise? where is the disputer of this world?" There is no natural light discovers CHRIST; the

wise men cannot find him out, unless a star be created on purpose to lead and direct to him. Therefore in this I shall only depend upon divine revelation.

1 Cor. ii. 7, 8. the gospel is called "the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory; which none of the princes of this world knew." Eph. i. 7, 8. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace, wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence. Eph. iii. 10, 11. "The manifold wisdom of God, according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in CHRIST JESUS our LORD." This work of "our redemption by JESUS CHRIST" is so various and admirable, that it is not below the angels to know and understand it. "To the intent, that unto principalities and powers in heavenly places, might be known the manifold wisdom of God."

II. By inquiring more particularly into the nature of this design, and the means how it is accomplished. This is wisdom, to fit means to ends: and the more difficult the end, the greater wisdom is required to find out suitable and sufficient means for the accomplishment of the end. Now "the wisdom of redemption" will appear, if we consider the case of fallen man; and what fit, and proper, and suitable means the wisdom of God hath devised for our recovery.

First, let us consider the case of fallen man, which was very sad, both in respect of the misery, and the difficulty of it.

1. In respect of the misery of it. Man, who was made holy and upright by God, having by his voluntary

luntary transgression, and wilful disobedience, fallen from him, did presently sink into a corrupt and degenerate, into a miserable and cursed condition of which heaven and earth, and his own conscience, bore him witness. Man being become a sinner, is not only deprived of the image of God, but is liable to his justice; here was his misery.

2. The difficulty of the case was this; man could not recover himself, and raise himself out of his own ruin; no creature was able to do it; so that our help is only in God; and, indeed, he is a merciful God, and doth not desire our ruin, nor delight in our destruction: but suppose his mercy never so willing to save us, will not his holiness, and justice, and truth check those forward inclinations of his goodness, and hinder all the designs of his mercy? Is not sin contrary to the holy nature of God? hath not he declared his infinite hatred of it? hath not he threatened it with heavy and dreadful punishment? and said, that "the sinner shall die," that "he will not acquit the guilty," nor "let sin go unpunished?" Should he now, without any satisfaction to his offended justice, pardon the sinner, remit his punishment, and receive him to favour; would this be agreeable to his holiness, and justice, and truth? would this become the wise governor of the world, who loves righteousness, and order; who hates sin, and is obliged, by the essential rectitude of his nature, to discountenance sin?

So that here is a conflict of the attributes and perfections of God. The mercy of God pities our misery, and would recover us, would open paradise to us: but there is a flaming sword that keeps us out; the incensed justice of God, that must be satisfied; and if he takes vengeance of us, we are eternally

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nally ruined ; if he spares us, how shall “ mercy
“ and justice meet together ? ” how shall God at
once express his love to the sinner, and his hatred to
sin ? here is the difficulty of our case.

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II. Let us now enquire what means the wisdom
of God useth for our recovery. The wisdom of
God hath devised this expedient to accommo-
date all these difficulties, to reconcile the mercy and
justice of God. The son of God shall undertake
this work, and satisfy the offended justice of God,
and repair the ruined nature of man. He shall bring
God and man together, make up this gulph, and
renew the commerce and correspondence between
God and us, which was broken off by sin. The
work that God designs is the redemption of man,
that is, his recovery from a state of sin and eternal
death, to a state of holiness and eternal life. The
son of God is to engage in this design of our redemp-
tion, to satisfy the offended justice of God towards
us, so as to purchase our deliverance from the wrath to
come, and so as to restore us to the image and fa-
vour of God, that we may be sanctified, and be
made heirs of eternal life.

For opening of this, we will consider,

1. The fitness of the person designed for this work.
2. The fitness of the means whereby he was to ac-
complish it.

1. The fitness of the person designed for this work,
and that was the eternal son of God ; who, in respect
of his infinite wisdom and power, the dignity and
credit of his person, his dearness to his father, and
interest in him, was very fit to undertake this work,
to mediate a reconciliation between God and man.

2. The fitness of the means whereby he was to ac-
complish it ; and these I shall refer to two heads, his
humiliation,

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humiliation, and exaltation. All the parts of these are very subservient to the design of our redemption.

I. The humiliation of CHRIST, which consists of three principal parts; his incarnation, his life, and his death.

1. His incarnation, which is set forth in scripture by several expressions? his being "made flesh, and dwelling among us," John i. 14. His being "made of the seed of David according to the flesh," Rom. i. 3. His being "made of a woman," Gal. iv. 4. The "manifestation of God in the flesh," 1 Tim. iii. 16. His "taking part of flesh and blood," Heb. ii. 14. His "taking on him the seed of Abraham," and "being made like unto his brethren," Heb. ii. 16, 17. His "coming in the flesh," 1 John ii. 2. All which signifies his taking upon him human nature, and being really a man as well as God. The eternal son of God, in the fullness of time, took our nature; that is, assumed a real soul and body into union with the divine nature. Now this person, who was really both God and man, was admirably fitted for the work of our redemption.

In general, this made him a fit mediator, an equal and middle person to interpose in this difference, and take up this quarrel between God and man. Being both God and man, he was concerned for both parties, and interested both in the honour of God, and the happiness of man, and engaged to be tender of both; and to procure the one, by such ways as might be consistent with the other.

More particularly, his incarnation did fit him for those two offices which he was to perform in his humiliation, of prophet and priest.

1. The office of prophet, to teach us both by his doctrine, and his life.

By his doctrine. His being in the likeness of man; this made him more familiar to us. He was “a prophet raised up from among his brethren,” as Moses spake, and he makes this an argument why we should hear him. Should God speak to us immediately by himself, we “could not hear him, and live.” God condescends to us, and complies with the weakness of our nature, and “raiseth up a prophet from among our brethren;” we should hear him. And then his being God, did add credit and authority to what he spake; he could confirm the doctrine which he taught by miracles. Of his teaching us by his life, I shall have occasion to speak presently.

2. For the office of priest. He was fit to be our priest, because “he was taken from among men,” as the Apostle speaks; fit to suffer, as being man, having “a body prepared,” as it is Heb. x. 5. and fit to satisfy by his sufferings for the sins of all men, as being God, which put an infinite dignity and value upon them; the sufferings of an infinite person, being equal to the offences done against an infinite God: and thus the mercy of God is exalted without the diminution of his justice.

And as his incarnation did qualify him for suffering, so for compassion, and fellow-suffering with us, Heb. ii. 17, 18. “Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high-priest, in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people; for in that he himself hath suffered, being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.”

2. His life was a means admirably fitted to bring men to holiness and goodness. I might go through all

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all the parts of it, but because I intend to be very short upon these heads, I shall only take notice of that part of his life, which was spent in his publick ministry ; “ he went about doing good ;” the doctrine that he preached was calculated for the destroying of sin, and the promoting of holiness ; the great end and design of it was to advance righteousness, and goodness, and humility, and patience, and self-denial ; to make us mortify our sensual desires, and brutish passions, to condemn and renounce this present world ; and this being the design of it, it was a most proper engine to demolish the works of the devil : and to make way for the entertainment of his doctrine, the whole frame of his life, and all the circumstances of it, did contribute. His life was the practice of his doctrine, and a clear comment upon it. The meanness of his condition in the world, that he had no share of the possessions of it, were a great advantage to his doctrine of self-denial, and contempt of the world. “ The captain of our salvation,” that he might draw off our affections from the world, and shew us how little the things of it are to be valued, would himself have no share in it, Mat. viii. 20. “ The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests, but the son of man hath not where to lay his head.” The mean circumstances of his condition were very eminently for the advantage of his design ; for had he not been stript of all worldly accommodations, he could not have been so free from suspicion of a worldly interest and design ; nay he could not have been so considerable ; he was really greater for his meanness. The very heathens did account this true greatness, (as we find in Aristotle) not to admire the pleasures, and greatness, and pomp of the world. And that his meanness might be no disadvantage

disadvantage to him, those evidences that he gave of his divinity in the wonderful things that he did, rendered him considerable, and gained more reverence and authority to his doctrine, than his meanness could bring contempt upon it.

Besides, the manner of his conversation was a very great advantage to him; he was of a very sweet and conversable and obliging temper; and by this means he did gain upon the people, and was acceptable to them; and thus he did apply himself to them in the most human ways, to make way for the entertainment of his doctrine. The miracles that he wrought did confirm his doctrine beyond all exception, as being a divine testimony, and setting a seal of God to the truth of it; yet because many were blinded with prejudice, and though they did see, yet would not see, CHRIST "the wisdom of God" did so order the business of his miracles, as to make them human ways of winning upon them, for they were generally such as were beneficial; "he healed all manner of diseases" and maladies by this miraculous power; and so his miracles did not only tend to confirm his doctrine, as they were miracles, but to make way for entertainment of it, as they were benefits; this was a sensible demonstration to them that he intended them good, because he did them good; they would easily believe, that he, who healed their bodies, would not harm their souls. This was for his life.

III. His death, which was the lowest step of his humiliation, and the consummation of his sufferings. Now the death of CHRIST did eminently contribute to this design of our redemption. The death of CHRIST did not only expiate the guilt of sin, and pacify conscience, by making plenary satisfaction to

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the divine justice; but did eminently contribute to the killing of sin in us: Rom. vi. 6. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we might not serve sin." Rom. viii. 3. "God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin" (that is, by being a sacrifice for sin) "condemned sin in the flesh." The death of CHRIST convinceth sin to be a great evil; and doth condemn it, because the impartial justice of God did so severely punish it in his own son, when he appeared in the person of a sinner; and this is the most powerful argument to us to crucify sin, that it crucified our SAVIOUR. That so innocent and holy a person should suffer so cruel and ignominious a death for our sins, should set us for ever against it, and make us hate it with a perfect hatred.

The circumstances of CHRIST's sufferings are with admirable wisdom fitted for the conquering of sin and Satan. Sin came by the woman: the seed of the woman suffers for sin; and by suffering, conquers it. Sin began in the garden; and there our SAVIOUR began his sufferings for sin. Sin came by the tree; and CHRIST bears the curse of it in hanging upon the tree, and crucifies it by his cross.

And as he conquered sin, so he overcame Satan by his own arts. The devil found CHRIST in the likeness of a man, he judged him mortal, and his great design was to procure his death, and get him into his grave. CHRIST permits him to bring about his design: he lets him enter into Judas; he lets the Jews crucify, and put him into his grave, and roll a great stone upon it: but here his divine wisdom appears, in ruining the devil by his own design, and "snaring him in the works of his own hands;"

Heb.

Heb.ii.14. " By death he destroys him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

I know the sufferings of CHRIST were, by the " wife of the world," made the great objection against the wisdom of this dispensation; the " cross of CHRIST was to the Greeks foolishness;" and yet the wisest of them had determined otherwise in general, though not in this particular case. Plato (in the second book of his commonwealth) saith, " That if a man may be a perfect pattern of justice and righteousness, and be approved by God and men, he must be stript of all the things of this world; he must be poor and disgraced, and be accounted a wicked and unjust man, he must be whipt, and tormented, and crucified as a malefactor;" which is, as it were, a propheticall description of our SAVIOUR'S sufferings. And Arrian, in his epistle, describing a man fit to reform the world, whom he calls " the apostle, the messenger, the preacher, and minister of God, saith, he must be without house and harbour, and worldly accommodations; must be armed with such patience for the greatest sufferings, as if he were a stone, and devoid of sense; he must be a spectacle of misery and contempt to the world." So that by the acknowledgment of these two wise heathens, there was nothing in the sufferings of CHRIST that was unbecoming the wisdom of God, and improper to the end and design of CHRIST'S coming into the world; besides, that they served a further end, which they did not dream of, " the satisfying of divine justice."

Secondly, His exaltation. The several parts of which, his resurrection, and ascension, and " sitting at the right hand of God," were eminently subservient to the perfecting and carrying on of this design.

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the divine justice; but did eminently contribute to the killing of sin in us: Rom. vi. 6. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we might not serve sin." Rom. viii. 3. "God sending his own son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin" (that is, by being a sacrifice for sin) "condemned sin in the flesh." The death of CHRIST convinceth sin to be a great evil; and doth condemn it, because the impartial justice of God did so severely punish it in his own son, when he appeared in the person of a sinner; and this is the most powerful argument to us to crucify sin, that it crucified our SAVIOUR. That so innocent and holy a person should suffer so cruel and ignominious a death for our sins, should set us for ever against it, and make us hate it with a perfect hatred.

The circumstances of CHRIST's sufferings are with admirable wisdom fitted for the conquering of sin and Satan. Sin came by the woman: the seed of the woman suffers for sin; and by suffering, conquers it. Sin began in the garden; and there our SAVIOUR began his sufferings for sin. Sin came by the tree; and CHRIST bears the curse of it in hanging upon the tree, and crucifies it by his cross.

And as he conquered sin, so he overcame Satan by his own arts. The devil found CHRIST in the likeness of a man, he judged him mortal, and his great design was to procure his death, and get him into his grave. CHRIST permits him to bring about his design: he lets him enter into Judas; he lets the Jews crucify, and put him into his grave, and roll a great stone upon it: but here his divine wisdom appears, in ruining the devil by his own design, and "snaring him in the works of his own hands;"

Heb.

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Secondly, His exaltation. The several parts of which, his resurrection, and ascension, and " sitting at the right hand of God," were eminently subservient to the perfecting and carrying on of this design.

The resurrection of CHRIST is the great confirmation of the truth of all that he delivered, Rom. i. 4. "declared to be the son of God with power," *ὁρισθέντος υἱὸς Θεοῦ ἐν δυνάμει*, by the resurrection "from the dead." This great miracle of his resurrection from the dead did determine the controversy, and put it out of all doubt and question, that he was "the son of God." And then his ascension, and "sitting at the right hand of God," this gives us the assurance of a blessed immortality, and is a demonstration of a life to come, and a pledge of everlasting glory and happiness. And can any thing tend more to the encouragement of obedience, and to make us dead to the pleasures and enjoyments of this life, than the assurance of eternal life and happiness?

And then the consequents of his exaltation, they do eminently conduce to our recovery. The sending of the Holy Ghost "to lead us into all truth," to sanctify us, to assist us, and to comfort us under the greatest troubles and afflictions; and the powerful intercession of CHRIST in our behalf; and his return to judgment; the expectation whereof is the great argument to repentance, and holiness of life: Acts xvii. 30, 31. "And the times of this ignorance God winked at, but now commandeth all men every where to repent: because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness, by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead." And thus I have endeavoured to prove that the "redemption of man by JESUS CHRIST" is a design of admirable wisdom.

The use I shall make of it, is to convince us of the

the unreasonableness of unbelief, and the folly and madness of impenitency.

First, The unreasonableness of unbelief. The gospel reveals to us the wise counsel and dispensation of God for our redemption; and those who disbelieve the gospel, "they reject the counsel of God against themselves," as it is said of the unbelieving Pharisees and lawyers, Luke vii. 30. The gospel reveals to us a design so reasonable and full of wisdom, that they who can disbelieve it are desperate persons, devoted to ruin. 1 Cor. i. 18. "The cross of CHRIST is to them that perish foolishness." 2 Cor. iv. 3, 4. "But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost; in whom the God of this world hath blinded the eyes of them that believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of CHRIST, who is the image of God, should shine unto them." The gospel carries so much light and evidence in it, that it cannot be hid from any but such whose eyes are blinded by the devil and their lusts.

He that will duly weigh and consider things, and look narrowly into this wise dispensation of God, shall find nothing to object against it; nay, shall discover in it the greatest motives and inducements to believe. We are apt to believe any thing that is reasonable, especially if it be for our advantage. Now this wise dispensation of God is not only reasonable in itself, but beneficial to us; it does at once highly gratify our understandings, and satisfy our interest; why should we not then believe and entertain it?

I. The design of the gospel is reasonable, and gratifies our understandings. And in this respect the gospel hath incomparable advantages above any other religion.

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religion. The end of all religion is to advance piety and holiness, and real goodness among men: and the more any religion advanceth these, the more reasonable it is. Now the great incitements and arguments to piety, are the excellency and perfection of the divine nature; fear of punishment and hopes of pardon and rewards. Now the gospel represents all these to the greatest advantage.

I. It represents the perfections of God to the greatest advantage, especially those which tend most to the promotion of piety, and the love of God in us; his justice and mercy.

(1.) His justice. The gospel represents it inflexible in its rights, and inexorable, and that will not in any case let sin go unpunished. The impartiality of the divine justice appears in this dispensation, that when God pardons the sinner, yet he will punish sin so severely in his own son, who was the surety. Now what could more tend to discountenance sin, and convince us of the great evil of it?

(2.) His mercy. This dispensation is a great demonstration of the mercy, and goodness, and love of God, in sending his son to die for sinners, and in saving us by devoting and sacrificing him, John iii. 16. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten son." Rom. v. 8. "But God commendeth his love towards us, in that while we were yet sinners, CHRIST died for us." 1 John iv. 9, 10. "In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because God sent his only begotten son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins." Now this representation of God's mercy and love which the gospel makes,

is

of great force and efficacy to melt our hearts into love to God.

2. The second argument to piety is fear of punishment. The gospel hath revealed to us the misery of those who continue in their sin; it hath made clear and terrible discoveries of those torments which attend sinners in another world, and hath opened to us the treasures of God's wrath; so that now under the gospel, "hell is naked before us, and destruction hath no covering;" and this is one thing which makes the gospel so powerful an engine to destroy sin, Rom. i. 16, 18. "The gospel is the power of God unto salvation; for therein is the wrath of God revealed from heaven against all ungodliness, and unrighteousness of men."

3. Hopes of pardon and reward. And this, added to the former, renders the gospel the most powerful instrument to take men off from sin, and engage them to holiness, that can be imagined. The means to draw men from sin, when they are once awakened with the fear of vengeance, is hopes of pardon and mercy; and the way to encourage obedience for the future, is hope of reward. Now as an argument to us to retreat and draw back from sin, the gospel promises pardon and indemnity to us; and as an incitement to holiness, the gospel opens heaven to us, and sets before us everlasting glory and happiness, and gives us the greatest assurance of it.

This is the first, the design of the gospel is reasonable, in that it does eminently and directly serve for the ends of piety and religion.

II. This dispensation of God is beneficial to us, and satisfies our interest; and this adds to the unreasonableness of our unbelief, this design of God

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being not only reasonable in itself, but desirable to us, that it should be so ; because of the eminent advantages that redound to us by it. The design of the gospel is to deliver us from the guilt and dominion of sin, and the tyranny of Satan ; to restore us to the image and favour of God ; and by making us partakers of a divine nature, to bring us to eternal life. And is there any thing of real advantage which is not comprehended in this ? Is it not desirable to every man, that there should be a way whereby our guilty consciences may be quieted and appeased ; whereby we may be delivered from the fear of death and hell ? Is it not desirable to be freed from the slavery of our lusts, and rescued from the tyranny and power of the great destroyer of souls ? Is it not desirable to be like God, and to be assured of his love and favour, who is the best friend, and the most dangerous enemy ; and to be secured, that when we leave this world, we shall be unspeakably happy for ever ? Now the gospel conveys these benefits to us ; and if this be the case of the gospel, and there be nothing in this design of our redemption, but what is wise and reasonable, and exceedingly for our benefit and advantage ; why should any man be so averse to the belief of it ? Why should unbelief be counted a piece of wit ? Is it wit to set our selves against reason, and to oppose our best interest ? 'Tis wickedness, and prejudice, and inconsiderateness which disbelieves the gospel. Those who do consider things welcome this good news, and embrace these glad tidings. " Wisdom is justified of her children." To them who are truly sensible of their own interest, and willing to accept of reasonable evidence, this is not only " a true saying," but " worthy of all acceptance ; that CHRIST came into the world to save " sinners."

Second-

Secondly, this doth convince men of the madness and folly of impenitency. Now since the wisdom of God hath contrived such a way of our recovery, and by the declaration of God's wrath, and displeasure against sin, hath given us such arguments to repentance, and by discovering a way of pardon and mercy, hath given us such encouragement to repentance, how great must the folly of impenitency be? For consider,

1. That impenitency directly sets itself against the "wisdom of God." If after all this we continue in our sins, "we reject the counsel of God against our selves," we despise the wisdom of God, and charge that with folly: and we do it against our selves, to our own injury and ruin. If we live in our sins, and cherish our lusts, we directly oppose the end of our redemption, we contradict the great design of the gospel, we contemn the admirable contrivance of God's wisdom, who sent his son into the world on purpose to destroy sin; for we uphold that which he came to destroy, 1 John iii. 5. "Ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins." Now shall we continue in sin, when we know "the son of God was manifested to take away sin?" God cannot but take it very ill at our hands, when he hath laid out "the riches of his wisdom" in this design, for us to go about to defeat him in it; this is at once to be unthankful to God, and injurious to our selves; it is such a madness, as if a condemned man should despise a pardon; as if a prisoner should be fond of his fetters, and refuse deliverance; as if a man desperately sick should fight with his physician, and put away health from him. If we do not comply with the "wisdom of God," who hath contrived our recovery;

S E R M. " we forsake our own mercy, and neglect a great
 CXXXIX. " salvation ; we love death, and hate our own souls,"
 Prov. viii. 14, 15, 16.

2. Consider, we cannot expect " the wisdom of
 " God" shall do more for our recovery, than hath
 been already done ; " the wisdom of God" will not
 try any further means. Mat. xxi. 37. " last of all
 " he sent his son." If we despise this way, if we
 " tread under foot the son of God, and count the
 " blood of the covenant, whereby we are sanctified,
 " an unholy thing, there will remain no more sacri-
 " fice for sin," Heb. x. 26, 29. What can expiate
 the guilt of sin, if the blood of CHRIST do not ?
 What shall take us off from sin, what shall sanctify
 us, if " the blood of the covenant" be ineffectual ?
 We resist our last remedy, and make void the best
 means the wisdom of God could devise for our re-
 covery, if, after the revelation of the gospel, we con-
 tinue in our sins.

3. If we frustrate this design of God's wisdom
 for our recovery, our ruin will be the more dread-
 ful and certain. Impenitency under the gospel will
 increase our misery. " If CHRIST had not come,
 " we had had no sin," in comparison of what we
 now have ; " but now our sin remains, and there is
 " no cloak for our sin," *πρόφασιν ἔκ ἔχουσιν*. We
 shall not be able at the day of judgment to preface
 any thing by way of excuse or apology for our im-
 penitency. What shall we be able to say to the jus-
 tice of God, when that shall condemn us, who re-
 jected his wisdom, which would have saved us ? We
 would all be saved, but we would be saved without
 repentance : now " the wisdom of God" hath not
 found out any other way to save us from hell, but
 by saving us from our sins. And thou that wilt not

submit

submit to this method of divine wisdom, take thy course, and let us see “ how thou wilt escape the “ damnation of hell.” I will conclude all with those dreadful words which “ the wisdom of God” pronounceth against those that despise her, and refuse to hearken to her voice, Prov. i. 24, 25, 26. “ Because I have called, and ye refused, I have “ stretched out my hand, and no man regarded ; “ but ye have set at naught my counsel, and would “ none of my reproof : I also will laugh at your calamity, I will mock when your fear cometh.” They who will not comply with the counsel of God for their happiness, they shall inherit the condition which they have chosen to themselves ; “ they shall “ eat the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with “ their own devices.”

S E R M O N CXL.

The justice of God in the distribution
of rewards and punishments.

G E N. xviii. 25.

Shall not the judge of all the earth do right ?

I N treating of the attributes of God, I have considered those which relate to the divine understanding, viz. knowledge and wisdom ; I come now to consider those which relate to the divine will, viz. these four, the justice, the truth, the goodness, and the holiness of God. I begin with the first, namely, the justice of God,

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At the 17th verse of this chapter, God by a great and wonderful condescension of his goodness, reveals to Abraham his intention concerning the destruction of Sodom; upon this Abraham, v. 23. interceded with God for saving of the righteous persons that were there; and to this end, he pleads with God his justice and righteousness, with which he apprehended it to be inconsistent "to destroy the righteous " with the wicked," which, without a miracle, could not be avoided in a general destruction. "Wilt " thou also destroy the righteous with the wicked? " Peradventure there be fifty righteous within the " city, wilt thou also destroy, and not spare the " place for the fifty righteous that are therein? " that be far from thee to do after this manner, to " slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the " righteous should be as the wicked, that be far " from thee; shall not the judge of all the earth " do right?" This negative interrogation is equivalent to a vehement affirmation, "shall not the " judge of all the earth do right?" that is, undoubtedly he will. This we may take for a certain and undoubted principle, that in the distribution of rewards and punishments, the judge of the world will do righteously.

So that the argument that lies under our consideration, is the justice of God in the distribution of rewards and punishments: for the clearing of which, we will consider it,

First, in hypothesis, in regard to the particular case which is here put by Abraham in the text.

Secondly, in thesis, we will consider it in general, in the distribution of rewards and punishments.

First, we will consider it in hypothesis, in regard to the particular case which is here put by Abraham in

in the text ; and the rather, because if we look well S E R M.
into it, there is something of real difficulty in it, CXL.

not easy to be cleared ; for Abraham's reasoning, if it be true, does plainly conclude, that it would have been unrighteous with God in the destruction of Sodom, not to make a difference between the righteous and the wicked, but to involve them equally in the same common destruction. " That be far from thee to do after this manner, to slay the righteous with the wicked, and that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee, shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" as if he had said, " surely the judge of all the earth will never do so unrighteous a thing."

And yet notwithstanding this, we see it is very usual for the providence of God to involve good men in general calamities, and to make no visible difference between the righteous and the wicked. Now the difficulty is, how to reconcile these appearances of providence with this reasoning of Abraham in the text.

And for doing of this, I see but one possible way, and that is this, that Abraham does not here speak concerning the judgments of God which befall men in the ordinary course of his providence, which many times happen promiscuously, and involve good and bad men in the same ruin ; and the reason hereof is plain, because God in his ordinary providence does permit the causes, which produce these judgments, to act according to their own nature, and they either cannot or will not make any distinction ; for the calamities which ordinarily happen in the world, are produced by two sorts of causes, either those which we call natural, or those which are voluntary. Natural causes, such as wind, and thunder,
and

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and storms, and the infection of the air, and the like; these acting by a necessity of nature, without any knowledge or choice, can make no distinction between the good and the bad. And the voluntary causes of calamities, as men are, they many times will make no difference between the righteous and the wicked; nay, many times they are maliciously bent against the righteous, and the effects of their malice fall heaviest upon them. Now we say that things happen in the way of ordinary providence, when natural causes are permitted to act according to their nature, and voluntary causes are left to their liberty; and therefore in the course of ordinary providence, it is not to be expected that such a distinction should be made; it is neither possible, nor does justice require it; it is not possible, supposing natural causes left to act according to their nature, and voluntary causes to be left to their liberty; nor does justice require it, for every man is so much a sinner, that no evil that befalls him in this world, can be said to be unjust in respect of God.

So that Abraham is not here to be understood, as speaking of such judgments as befall men in the ordinary course of God's providence, in which, if the good and bad be involved alike, it cannot be expected to be otherwise, nor is there any injustice in it; but Abraham here speaks of miraculous and extraordinary judgments, which are immediately inflicted by God for the punishment of some crying sins, and the example of the world, to deter others from the like. And such was this judgment, which God intended to bring upon Sodom, and which Abraham hath relation to in this discourse of his. In this case it may be expected from the justice of God, that a difference should be made between the righteous and the wicked; and that for these reasons:

1. Be-

1. Because this is a judgment which God himself executes. It is not an event of common providence, which always follows the nature of it's cause, but an act of God, as a judge. Now it is essential to a judge to make a discrimination between the good and the bad, so as to punish the one, and spare the other; and this is as necessary to all proper acts of judgment in this world, as the other; there being no other difference between them, but that one is a particular judgment, and the other the general judgment of the whole world.

2. When God goes out of the way of his ordinary providence in punishing, it may reasonably be expected that he should make a difference between the good and the bad; for the reason why he does not in his common providence is, because he will not break and interrupt the established order of things upon every little occasion: but when he does go besides the common course of things in punishing, the reason ceaseth, which hindered him before from making a difference; and it is reasonable enough to expect, that in the inflicting of a miraculous judgment, a miraculous difference should be made. Without making this difference, the end of these miraculous judgments would not be attained, which is, remarkably to punish the crying sins of men, and by that example to deter others from the like sins: but if these judgments should fall promiscuously upon the righteous and the wicked, it would not be evident, that they were designed for the punishment of such sins, when men did see, that they fell likewise upon those who were not guilty of those sins, and consequently the example could not be so effectual to deter men from sin.

Upon all these accounts you see that Abraham's reasoning

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reasoning was very strong and well grounded, as to those judgments which are miraculous and extraordinary, and immediately inflicted by God, for the punishment of great and heinous sins, which was the case he was speaking of. And accordingly we find, that in those judgments which have been immediately and miraculously inflicted by God, he hath always made this difference between the righteous and the wicked. In the deluge which he brought upon the old world, the spirit of God gives this reason why the judgment was so universal, because "all flesh" "had corrupted his way upon the earth;" and the reason why he saved Noah and his family was, because in this general corruption of mankind he alone was righteous; "thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation." So likewise in that miraculous judgment of Korah and his company, when "God made a new thing, and the earth opened her mouth to swallow them up," none perished but he and his complices; the rest had warning given them by God to "remove from the tents of those wicked men." Thus you see that as to the particular case in this text, Abraham's reasoning concerning the justice of God is very firm, and concluding. I proceed to the

Second thing, which was that which I principally intended to discourse upon, viz. to consider the justice of God in general, in the distribution of rewards and punishments. And here I cannot but grant, that the best evidence of this is yet wanting. We have clear demonstrations of the power, and wisdom, and goodness of God in this vast and admirable frame of things which we see; but we must stay till the day of judgment for a clear and full manifestation of the divine justice; for which reason the day of judgment

ment is in scripture called, "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." But in the mean time we may receive sufficient assurance of this, both from natural reason, and from divine revelation.

1. From natural reason, which tells us, that "God loves righteousness," and "hates iniquity," and consequently that it must be agreeable to his nature, to countenance and encourage the one, and to discountenance the other; that is, to give some public testimony of his liking and affection to the one, and of his hatred and dislike of the other; which cannot otherwise be done, but by rewards and punishments.

But however the heathen reasoned about this matter, whatever premises they laid, they firmly believed the conclusion, that God is just. Plato lays down this as a certain and undoubted principle, "That God is in no wise unjust, but as righteous as is possible; and that we cannot resemble God more, than in this quality and disposition." So likewise Seneca tells us, "That the Gods are neither capable of receiving an injury, nor of doing any thing that is unjust." Antoninus the great emperor and philosopher, speaking doubtfully, whether good men are extinguished by death, or remain afterwards; "If it be just, says he, you may be sure it is so; if it be not just, you may certainly conclude the contrary; for God is just, and being so, he will do nothing that is unjust or unreasonable." And indeed the heathen philosophers looked upon this as the great sanction of all moral precepts, that God was the witness and the avenger of the breach and violation of them, *Qui secus faxit, Deus ipse vindex erit*; "If any man do contrary to them, God himself will punish it;" which shews, that there

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is a natural awe upon the minds of men of the divine justice, which will overtake offenders either in this world or the other. But this will more clearly appear in the

2. Place, from scripture, or divine revelation. And those texts which I shall produce to this purpose, may be reduced to these two heads; either such as prove the rectitude of the divine nature and his justice in general; or such as speak more particularly of the justice and equity of his providence in the distribution of rewards and punishments. I begin, first, with those which declare the rectitude of the divine nature, and the justice of GOD in general, and that either by attributing this perfection to him, or by removing the contrary, injustice and unrighteousness, at the greatest distance from him.

1. Those which attribute this perfection to GOD. I shall mention but a few of many, Psal. cxxix. 4. "The LORD is righteous." Dan. ix. 7. "O LORD! righteousness belongeth unto thee." This good men have acknowledged, when they have lain under the hand of GOD, Ezra ix. 15. "O LORD GOD of Israel, thou art righteous." And this the worst of men have been forced to own, when they have been in extremity, Ex. ix. 27. then Pharaoh said, "the LORD is righteous." This hath been likewise acknowledged by those who have lain under the greatest temptation to doubt of it, Jer. xii. 1. "righteous art thou, O LORD, when I plead with thee: yea, let me talk with thee of thy judgment; wherefore doth the way of the wicked prosper?" The prophet, notwithstanding he saw the prosperous condition of wicked men, and the afflicted state of the godly, which seemed hard to be reconciled with the justice of GOD's providence: yet before he would

so much as reason about it, he lays down this as a certain conclusion, "righteous art thou, O LORD." SERM.
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To this head likewise belong all those texts which speak of righteousness, as GOD's dwelling place, and his throne, of his delight in justice, and of the duration and eternity of it, which I need not particularly recite.

2. There are likewise other texts, which remove the contrary, viz. injustice and unrighteousness at the greatest distance from GOD, as being most contrary to his nature and perfection. Deut. xxxii. 4. "A GOD of truth, and without iniquity." 2 Chron. xix. 7. "There is no iniquity with the LORD our GOD, nor accepting of persons, nor taking of gifts." Job viii. 3. "Doth GOD pervert judgment? or doth the Almighty pervert justice?" which is a vehement negation of the thing. Job xxxiv. 10, 11, 12. "Far be it from GOD, that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity. For the work of a man shall he render unto him, and cause every man to find according to his ways. Yea, surely GOD will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment." Rom. ix. 14. "What shall we say then? is there unrighteousness with GOD? GOD forbid."

Secondly, there are other texts which speak more particularly of the justice and righteousness of GOD in the distribution of rewards and punishments. 'Tis true indeed, the justice of GOD doth not constantly appear in this world in the dispensations of his providence, because this is a time of patience and forbearance to sinners, and of trial and exercise to good men; but there is a day a coming, when all things shall be set strait, and every man shall receive the

The justice of GOD in the distribution

just reward of his deeds, when the justice of GOD shall be evident to all the world, and every eye shall see it, and shall acknowledge the righteous judgment of GOD; and this the scripture most clearly and expressly declares unto us; and hence it is, that the day of judgment is called "the day of the revelation of the righteous judgment of GOD." The righteousness of GOD doth not now so clearly appear, but that there are many clouds over it; but there shall be a day of revelation, when the righteousness of GOD shall be made manifest to all the world.

The remunerative justice of GOD shall then appear in the rewarding the righteous; and the punitive justice of GOD in punishing the wicked and ungodly; "so that a man shall say, verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily there is a GOD that judgeth the world."

Now the righteousness of this vengeance of GOD, which GOD will take upon sinners, is further set forth to us in scripture, from the equity and impartiality of it.

I. From the equity of it.

1. In that the sins of men have justly deserved the punishment, that shall come upon them, Rom. i.

32. "Who knowing the judgment of GOD, δικαιώμα τῆ θεῶς, the righteous judgment of GOD, that they which commit such things, are worthy of death."

2. In that the judgment of GOD shall be proportioned to the degree and heinousness of men's sins, so as the lesser or greater sins shall be punished with more or less severity. So our SAVIOUR threatens to those who continue impenitent under the gospel, and the advantages of it, their ease shall be more sad than that of Tyre and Sidon, and "it shall be more

!! tolerable

tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah at the day of judgment, than for them." Mat. xi. 20, 21. and Luke xii. 47, 48. There you have different degrees of punishment threatened, proportionable to the aggravations of the sins which men have committed; The servant which knew his lord's will, and prepared not himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes: but he that knew it not, but did commit things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few stripes;" and so proportionably of all other aggravations of sins, "for to whom much is given, of him shall much be required; and unto whom men have committed much, of him they will ask the more." So likewise God will vindicate the contempt of the gospel more severely than of the law, because the confirmation of it is clearer, and the salvation offered by it greater. Heb. ii. 2, 3, 4. "If the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward, how shall we escape?" &c. And so, Heb. x. 28, 29. "He that despised Moses his law, died without mercy under two or three witnesses, of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the son of God?" &c.

II. The righteousness of this judgment is further set forth to us in scripture by the impartiality of it. Hither belong all those texts, which remove from God that προσωποληψία, that respect of persons, which is so incident to human tribunals. Now respect of persons is in distribution of justice, and hath regard to some external qualities or circumstances of the persons, which do not appertain to the merit of the cause, and upon account of those circumstances,

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to deal unequally with those, whose case is equal as when two persons, who are equally guilty of crime, are brought to their trial, and the one is condemned, and the other acquitted, upon the account of friendship, or relation, or some other interest because one is poor and the other rich, the one hath powerful friends to intercede for him, the other not, the one brings a gift or bribe, the other not, or upon any other account, besides the pure merits of the cause; I say to deal thus in the distribution of justice, is respect of persons. Otherwise in matters of mere grace and favour respect of persons hath no place, according to that common rule of divines, *προσωποληψία locum non habet in gratuitis sed in debitis*. Now this the scripture every where speaks of, as a thing very far from GOD, Deut. x. 17. "The LORD your GOD is the GOD of gods, and LORD of lords, a great GOD, a mighty and terrible, which regardeth not persons, nor taketh rewards." 2 Chron. xix. 7. "There is no iniquity with the LORD our GOD, nor respect of persons, nor taking of gifts." Job xxxiv. 18, 19. "Is it fit to say to a king, thou art wicked? or to princes, ye are ungodly? how much less to him that accepteth not the person of princes, nor regardeth the rich more than the poor? for they are all the work of his hands." Rom. ii. 6. "Who will render to every man according to his deeds: for there is no respect of persons with GOD." Acts x. 34, 35. "of a truth I perceive that GOD is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him." Eph. vi. 8, 9. The apostle therefore presseth the duties of servants to masters, from this consideration, that "whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall be rewarded him." "ma

man doth, the same shall he receive of the LORD, whether he be bond or free ;” and at the 9th ver. Ye masters, do the same thing unto them, forbearing threatening ; knowing that your master also is in heaven, neither is there respect of persons with him.” He maketh this likewise an argument, why men should not oppress and deal deceitfully one with another, Col. iii. 25. “ But he that doth wrong, shall receive for the wrong which he hath done ; and there is no respect of persons.” And in general, St. Peter urgeth this consideration upon all men to deter them from sin in any kind, 1 Pet. i. 17. “ And if ye call on the father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man’s work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear.

And besides that the scripture doth remove this at the greatest distance from GOD, it gives us also several instances of the impartiality of the divine justice, that it is not to be perverted and turned aside by any of those extrinsecal considerations which commonly sway with men ; it is not to be prevailed with and overcome by flattery and entreaties, Mat. vii. 21, 22. “ Not every one that saith unto me LORD, LORD, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven ; but he that doth the will of my father which is in heaven,” &c. The divine justice is not to be imposed upon by good words, and external shews, and false professions ; so neither by any external relation to him ; “ for many shall come from the east, and from the west, and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of GOD, but the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into utter darkness.”

And

The justice of GOD in the distribution

And however men may bear up themselves now upon their worldly greatness and power, certainly there is a time coming, when the greatest persons in the world, those who overturn kingdoms, and lay waste countries, and oppress and ruin millions of mankind for the gratifying of their own lusts and ambition, I say there is a day a coming, when even these, as much, nay, more than others, shall fear and tremble before the impartial justice of GOD. Rev. vi. 15.

“ And the kings of the earth, and the great men,
 “ and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the
 “ mighty men, and every bond-man and every free-
 “ man shall hide themselves in the dens, and in the
 “ rocks of the mountains ; for the great day of his
 “ wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand ? ”

The impartial justice of GOD will treat the greatest and the meanest persons alike, Rev. xx. 12. “ I saw
 “ the dead, small and great, stand before GOD ;
 “ and the books were opened, and another book
 “ was opened, which is the book of life ; and the
 “ dead were judged out of those things which were
 “ written in the books according to their works. ”

All judged “ according to their works. ”

I should next proceed to vindicate the justice of GOD in the distribution of rewards and punishments from those objections, which seem to impeach it. But before I enter upon this, it will be convenient to satisfy one question, which hath occasioned great disputes in the world, and that is, how far justice, especially as to the punishment of offenders, is essential to GOD ? And for the clearing of this matter, I shall briefly lay down these propositions.

First, I take this for a certain and undoubted truth, that every perfection is essential to GOD, and cannot be imagined to be separated from the divine nature.

nature, because this is the natural notion which men have of God, that he is a being that hath all perfection. SERM.
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Secondly, the actual constant exercise of those divine perfections, the effects whereof are without himself, is not essential to God. For instance, though God be essentially powerful and good, yet it is not necessary, that he should always exercise his power and goodness, but at such times, and in such a manner, as seems best to his wisdom; and this is likewise true of his wisdom and justice, because these are perfections, the effects whereof are terminated upon something without himself.

Thirdly, it is essential to God to love goodness, and hate sin, wherever he sees them. It is not necessary there should be a world, or reasonable creatures in it: but upon supposition that God makes such creatures, it is agreeable to the divine nature, to give them good and righteous laws, to encourage them in the doing of that which is good, and to discourage them from doing that which is evil; which cannot be done, but by rewards and punishments; and therefore it is agreeable to the perfection of the divine nature, to reward goodness, and to punish sin.

Fourthly, as for those rewards which the gospel promiseth, and the punishments which it threatens, there is some difference to be made between the rewarding and punishing justice of God.

1. As for that abundant reward God is pleased to promise to good men, the promise of it is founded in his goodness; and the performance of that promise, in his justice; for it is justice to perform what he promises, though the promise of so great and abundant a reward was mere goodness.

2. As for the punishing justice of God, about

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which hath been the great question, whether that be essential to God or not, it seems very plain, that it is not necessary that God should inflict those judgments which he threatens, because he hath threatened them; for there is not the like obligation upon persons to perform their threatnings, that there is to perform their promises; because God by his promise becomes a debtor to those to whom he makes the promise; but when he threatens, he is the creditor, and we are debtors to his justice; and as a creditor, he may remit the punishment which he hath threatened: but then if we consider God as loving goodness and hating sin; if we look upon him as governor of the world, and concerned to preserve good order, to encourage holiness and righteousness, and to discountenance sin, under this consideration it is essential to him to punish sin at such times, and in such manner and circumstances, as seems best to his wisdom.

And I am not at all moved by that, which is urged by some learned men to the contrary, that if punishing justice were essential to God, then he must punish the sinner immediately, so soon as he hath offended, and to the utmost of his power; because whatever acts naturally, acts necessarily, and to the utmost: for I do not suppose such a justice essential to God as acts necessarily, but such a justice, which as to the time, and manner, and circumstances of it's acting, is regulated and determined by his wisdom; and there is the same reason likewise of his goodness.

I come now to the objections, which are taken partly from the dispensations of God in this world; and partly from the punishments of the other.

First, as to the dispensations of God in this world, there

there are these two things objected against the justice of the divine providence.

I. The inequality of God's dealing with good and bad men in this world.

II. The translation of punishments, punishing one man's sin upon another, as the sins of the fathers upon the children, of the prince upon the people. I begin with the

I. Objection, the inequality of God's dealing with good and bad men in this world. In this life things happen promiscuously, "there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked;" if the wicked suffer and are afflicted, so are the righteous; if the righteous sometimes flourish, so do the wicked: and is not this unjust, that those who are so unequal as to their deserts, should be equally dealt withal? Or if there be any inequality, it is usually the wrong way; the wicked do, many times, prosper more in the world, and the righteous are frequently more afflicted. This was the great objection of old against the providence of God, which the heathen philosophers took so much pains to answer, nay, it did often shake the faith of holy and good men in the old testament. Job xii. 6. "The tabernacles of robbers prosper, and they that provoke God are secure; into whose hand God bringeth abundantly;" and chap. xxi. 7, 8, 9. he expostulates the same matter again: and David says, this was a great stumbling-block to him, Psal. lxxiii. 2, 3. and the like we find in the prophets, Jer. xii. 1. and Hab. i. 13. This objection I have elsewhere considered, I shall now very briefly offer two or three things, which I hope will be sufficient to break the force of it.

1. It must be granted, that it is not necessary to justice to shew itself immediately, and to dispense

rewards and punishments so soon as there are objects for them. This is not thought necessary among men; much more ought we to leave it to the wisdom of God to determine the time and circumstances of the exercising of his justice; and we are not to conclude, that the providence of God is unjust, if he do not bestow rewards, and inflict punishments, just when we think he should.

2. If God intended this life for a state of trial, wherein he would prove the obedience of men, and their free inclination to good or evil, it is not reasonable to expect that he should follow men with present rewards and punishments; for that would lay too great a force upon men, so that there would hardly be any opportunity of trying them; but, on the contrary, there is all the reason in the world to presume that God should exercise the graces and virtues of good men with afflictions and sufferings, and suffer bad men to take their course for a while, and walk in their own ways, without continual checks, by frequent and remarkable judgments upon them, so often as they offend.

3. If there be another life after this, wherein men shall be judged "according to their works," then this objection vanisheth; for that great day will set all things strait, which seem now to be so crooked and irregular. The deferring of rewards and punishments to the most convenient season, is so far from being a reflection upon the justice of God, that it is highly to the commendation of it. What Claudian says of Ruffinus, a very bad man, whose long impunity had tempted men to call in question the justice of God, is considerable in this case;

*Abstulit hunc tandem Ruffini pœna tumultum,
Absolvitque deos.*

"The

“ The punishment which overtook him at last, did quiet those tumultuous thoughts, and absolved the gods from all blame.” When men look out a little way, and consider only the present state of things, they are ready to quarrel at the justice of them; but if they would look at the end of things, and have patience to stay till the last, to see the conclusion and winding up of things, they would then acquit God in their thoughts from all those imputations of injustice which, from the inequality of present dispensations, rash and inconsiderate men are to charge him withal.

II. Objection, from the translation of punishments, the punishing of one man's sin upon another, as of “ the fathers upon the children,” which God threatens in the second commandment, and did, in some sort, fulfil in Ahab, in “ bringing the evil he had threatened him withal, in his son's days,” 1 Kings xxi. 19. The punishing the sin of one person upon a people, as that of Achan upon the whole congregation, Josh. xxii. 20. “ Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a trespass in the accursed thing, and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel? and that man perished not alone in his iniquity.” And the sin of David upon the people, 2 Sam. xxiv. When seventy thousand died of the plague, for David's sin in numbering the people. Now how is this agreeable to justice? Is it not a known rule, *Noxa caput sequitur*? “ mischief pursues the sinner?” What can be more reasonable, *Quam ut peccata suos teneant auctores*? “ Than that mens faults should be charged upon the authors,” and punishment fall upon the guilty?

For answer to this,

1. It is not unreasonable that one man should bear the

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the punishment of another's fault, if he be willing and content to bear it, *volenti non fit injuria*; "There is no wrong done to those that are willing to undergo it," though they be innocent; which was the case of our blessed SAVIOUR suffering for us "the just for the unjust," as the scripture expresseth it.

2. Where the person, upon whom the punishment is transferred, is likewise a sinner, and obnoxious to God, there can be no injustice; because he hath deserved it upon his own account, and God may take what occasion he pleaseth to punish them that deserve to be punished.

3. In punishing "the iniquity of the father upon the children," the guilty person, that is, the father, is punished in the calamity of his children; for a man's children are himself multiplied; and therefore it is very remarkable, that in the second commandment, God promiseth "to shew mercy to thousands of generations of them that love him," but he visits the iniquities of the fathers upon the children, but to the third and fourth generation, that is, so far as man may live to see them punished and suffer in their punishment.

4. As to the punishment of the people for the sins of their princes and governors, and one part of a community for another, supposing all of them to be sinners, which is the true case, God may lay the punishment where he pleaseth; and there is no more injustice than when a man is whipt on the back for the theft which his hand committed, a community being one body: besides, the prince is punished in the loss of his people, the glory of a king consisting in the multitude of his subjects.

The objection with respect to the other world,

the punishment of temporal evils with eternal, is elsewhere answered.

The use we should make of this whole discourse is,

First, If God be just and righteous, let us acknowledge it in all his dispensations, even in those, the reason whereof is most hidden and obscure: Neh. ix. 3. speaking of the great afflictions that had befallen God's own people, yet this he lays down as a firm principle, "howbeit, thou art just in all that is brought upon us."

Secondly, this is matter of terror to wicked men. God doth now exercise his milder attributes towards sinners, his mercy, and patience, and goodness: but if we despise these, that terrible attribute of his justice will display itself; and this the scripture describes in a severe manner; "the LORD revengeth, and is jealous; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and reserveth wrath for his enemies."

Thirdly, this is matter of comfort to good men, that the righteous God governs the world, and will judge it: "the LORD reigneth, let the earth rejoice," Psal. xcvii. 1. And he gives the reason of it in the next verse; "righteousness and judgment are the habitation of his throne." Though he be omnipotent, we need not fear; for his power is always under the conduct of eternal righteousness.

Fourthly, let us imitate this righteousness; let us endeavour "to be righteous as he is righteous;" let us give to God the love, reverence, and obedience which are due to him; and in all our dealings, what is just and due to men. This duty hath an immutable reason, founded in the nature of God.

S E R M O N CXLI.

The truth of God.

D E U T. xxxii. 4.

*—A God of truth.*S E R M.
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IN speaking to this attribute, I shall
I. Shew you what we are to understand by the truth of God.

II. Endeavour to prove that this perfection belongs to God, that he is “a God of truth.”

III. Answer some objections that may be made against it; and then make some use of it.

I. What we are to understand by the truth of God. I shall take it as the scripture useth it in a large sense, so as to include not only the veracity of God, but his faithfulness. Hence it is that, in scripture, truth and faithfulness are so often put together, and frequently put one for another: Isa. xxv. 1. “Thy counsels of old are faithfulness and truth.” Rev. xxi. 1. “These words are true and faithful.” And the faithfulness of God, in performing his promises, is frequently called his truth. And because the scripture useth them promiscuously, we need not be very solicitous to find out distinct notions of them: but if you will, they may be distinguished thus: the truth or veracity of God hath place in every declaration of his mind; the faithfulness of God, only in his promises.

For the first, the veracity or truth of God; this hath place in every declaration of his mind; and signifies an exact correspondence and conformity be-

tween

between his word and his mind, and consequently between his word and the truth and reality of things. The correspondence of his word with his mind, depends upon the rectitude of his will; the conformity of his word with the reality of things, not only upon the rectitude of his will, but the perfection of his knowledge, and the infallibility of his understanding: so that when we say God is true, or speaks truth, we mean thus, that his words are a plain declaration of his mind, and the true representation of things, in opposition to falshood, which is speaking otherwise than the thing is; and hypocrisy, that is, speaking otherwise than we think. For instance, when God declares any thing to be so, or not to be so, to have been thus, or not to have been thus; the thing really is so, and he thinks so; when he expresseth his desire of any thing, he does really desire it; when he commands any thing, or forbids us any thing, it is really his mind and will that we should do what he commands, and avoid what he forbids; when he declares and foretels any thing future, it really shall come to pass, and he really intended it should; if the declaration be to be understood absolutely, it shall absolutely come to pass; if the declaration be to be understood conditionally, it shall come to pass, and he intends it shall, if the condition be performed.

Secondly, the faithfulness of God. This only hath place in his promises, in which there is an obligation of justice superadded to his word; for God, by his promise, doth not only declare what he intends, and what shall be; but confers a right upon them to whom the promise is made, so as that the breach of his promise would not only cast an imputation upon his truth, but upon his justice.

II. That this perfection belongs to God. And this I shall endeavour to prove,

The truth of God.

First, from the dictates of natural light.
Secondly, from scripture.

First, from the dictates of natural light. Natural light tells us, that truth and faithfulness are perfections, and consequently belong to the divine nature; and that falshood and a lie are imperfections, and to be removed from God. There is nothing that is esteemed amongst men a greater contumely and reproach, than to give a man the lie, to call him a liar, because it is an argument of so much baseness, and of a low, and mean, and servile spirit; the usual temptation to it being fear of losing some advantage, or incurring some danger. Hence was that saying, that "it is the property of a slave to lie, but of a free man to speak truth:" now, whatever argues baseness or imperfection, our reason tells us is infinitely to be separated from the most perfect being. "God cannot be tempted with evil," the divine nature being all-sufficient, can have no temptation to be otherwise than good, and just, and true, and faithful. Men are tempted to lie by advantage, and out of fear: but the divine nature hath the security of its fulness and all-sufficiency, that it cannot hope for any increase, nor fear any impairment of its estate. Men are unfaithful, and break their words, either because they are rash and inconsiderate in passing of them, or forgetful in minding them, or inconstant in keeping of them, or impotent and unable to perform them: but none of these are incident to God; his infinite wisdom, and perfect knowledge, and clear foresight of all events, secure him both from inconsiderateness and inconstancy, and forgetfulness; and his infinite power renders him able to perform what he hath spoken, and to make good his word. And that these are the natural dictates and suggestions of our minds appears clearly from the reasoning of the heathens

in this matter, who were destitute of divine revelation. Plato de repub. l. 2. lays down this as a certain truth, “ that lying and falshood are imperfections, and odious to God and men; τὸ μὲν

ψεύδος ἔστι μόνον ἀπὸ θεῶν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὑπὲρ ἀνθρώπων ποιεῖται.” And afterwards he tells us, “ that the divine nature is free from all temptations hereto,

either from advantage or fear; ἐκ ἧς ἔστιν ἡ ἕνεκα τοῦ θεοῦ ψεύδοιτο; πάντα ἄρα ἀψευδὲς τὸ θεῖον;” and concludes, “ therefore God is true, and deals plainly with us, both in his words and actions, and is neither changed himself, nor deceives us.” Porphyry, in the life of Pythagoras, tells us, “ that this

was one of his precepts, μάλις αὖτ’ ἀληθεύειν; τῷ γὰρ μόνον δύνασθαι τὰς ἀνθρώπων ποιεῖν θεῶν παραπλησίους; and afterwards he adds, “ that truth is so great a perfection, that if God would render himself visible to men, he would chuse light for his body, and truth for his soul.

Secondly, from scripture. The scripture doth very frequently attribute this to God, 2 Sam. vii. 28.

“ And now, O LORD God, thou art that God, and thy words be true.” Psal. xxv. 10. “ All the paths of the LORD are mercy and truth. Psal. xxxi.

5. “ Into thine hand I commit my spirit; thou hast redeemed me, O LORD God of truth.” Rev.

iii. 7. “ These things saith he that is holy, he that is true.” Rev. vi. 10. “ How long, O LORD,

“ holy and true?” xv. 3.” “ Just and true are thy ways, thou king of saints.” xvi. 7. “ True and

“ righteous are thy judgments.” Hither we may refer those texts which speak of the plenty and abundance of God’s truth: Ex. xxxiv. 6. “ Abundant

“ in goodness and truth.” Psal. lxxxvi. 15. “ Plenteous in mercy and truth;” and those which

“ speak

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speak of the duration and eternity of it : Psal. c.
 5. " And his truth endureth to all generations."
 cxvii. 2. " And the truth of the LORD endureth
 for ever." cxlvi. 6. " Who keepeth truth for
 " ever."

As the scripture doth attribute this perfection to
 God, so it removes the contrary from him with the
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 " God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the
 " son of man, that he should repent : hath he said,
 " and shall not he do it ? or hath he spoken, and
 " shall he not make it good ?" They are Balaam's
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 " That by two immutable things, in which it was im-
 " possible for God to lie, we might have a strong
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all that he hath declared, he had a secret design to
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that if he did not intend to bestow it upon us, or if
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our SAVIOUR, who was " the express image of the
Father, full of grace and truth." John xiv. 2.
" In my Father's house are many mansions ; if it
were not so, I would have told you."

And as the scripture assures us of his sincerity, so
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fore that the LORD thy GOD, he is GOD, the
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cy." Psal. lxxxix. 33, 34. " I will not suffer
my faithfulness to fail : my covenant will I not
break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my
lips." The scripture doth record GOD's punctu-
al and full performance of his promises, particular-
ly of that promise to Abraham, after four hundred
years,

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5. "And his truth endureth to all generations." cxvii. 2. "And the truth of the LORD endureth for ever." cxlvi. 6. "Who keepeth truth for ever."

As the scripture doth attribute this perfection to God, so it removes the contrary from him with the greatest abhorrence and detestation: Num. xxiii. 19. "God is not a man, that he should lie, neither the son of man, that he should repent: hath he said, and shall not he do it? or hath he spoken, and shall he not make it good?" They are Balaam's words, but God put them into his mouth. 1 Sam. xv. 29. "The strength of Israel will not lie, nor repent: for he is not a man that he should repent." Rom. iii. 4. "Yea let God be true, and every man a liar." Nay, the scripture goes further; does not only remove lying, and falshood, and inconstancy from God, but speaks of these as things impossible to the divine nature: Tit. i. 2. "In hope of eternal life, which God that cannot lie, promised before the world began." Heb. vi. 18. "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us."

And the scripture doth not only in general attribute this perfection to God, but doth more particularly assure us of his sincerity and truth and faithfulness. Of his sincerity; that he deals plainly with us, and speaks what he intends, that his words are the image of his thoughts, and a true representation of his mind. God is very careful to remove this jealousy out of the minds of men, who are apt to entertain unworthy thoughts of God, as if notwithstanding all

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cy." Psal. lxxxix. 33, 34. " I will not suffer
my faithfulness to fail : my covenant will I not
break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my
lips." The scripture doth record GOD's punctu-
al and full performance of his promises, particular-
ly of that promise to Abraham, after four hundred
years,

years, to bring the children of Israel out of Egypt, "and to give them the Land of Canaan for an inheritance," Gen. xv. 13. the punctual accomplishment you have recorded Ex. xii. 41. "And it came to pass at the end of the four hundred and thirty years, even the self same day it came to pass, that all the hosts of the LORD went out from the land of Egypt." See likewise Jos. xxi. 44, 45. and xxiii. 14. 1 Kings viii. 56. And upon this account it is that God is so frequently in scripture styled "the God that keepeth covenant," 1 Kings viii. 23. Neh. i. 5. ix. 32. and in several other places. And so likewise of predictions of evil to come, God is true in fulfilling his word, 1 Sam. xv. 29. When the prophet had threatened Saul to rent the kingdom from him, he adds, "the strength of Israel will not lie, nor repent, for he is not a man that he should repent."

III. I come to remove some objections that may be made against the truth and faithfulness of God.

First, It is objected against the sincerity of God, and his plain dealing, that he is sometimes represented in scripture, as inspiring prophets with false messages, 1 Kings xxii. 20, &c. Jer. iv. 10. xx. 7. Ezek. xiv. 9.

Ans. As to three of these texts, it is a known Hebraism to express things in an imperative and active form, which are to be understood only permissively. So where "the devils besought CHRIST, that he would suffer them to enter into the herd of swine, he said unto them, go," Mat. viii. 31. He did not command, but permit them. And so John xiii. 27. where our SAVIOUR says to Judas, "what thou dost, do quickly;" we are not to understand, that he commanded him to betray him, though that seem

seem to be expressed in the form. So likewise here, where an evil spirit offered himself to be "a lying spirit in the mouth of the prophet:" and God says, "go forth, and do so; this only signifies a permission, not a command. And so Jer. iv. 10. where the prophet complains that God had greatly deceived the people, "saying, they should have peace, when the sword reached to the soul;" we are to understand this no otherwise, but that God permitted the false prophets to deceive them, prophesying peace to them; as appears by the history. Ezek. xiv. 9. "I the LORD have deceived that prophet," that is, permitted him to be deceived, and to deceive the people," as a just judgment upon them for their infidelity, with respect to his true prophets. This he threatens at the 5th verse; "I will take the house of Israel in their own heart, because they are all estranged from me through their idols;" because they have chosen to themselves false gods, I will suffer them to be deceived with false prophets: and that this is the meaning, appears by the threatening added, "and I will stretch my hand upon him, and I will destroy him from the midst of the people. Now God will not punish that whereof he is the author.

That text, Jer. xx. 7. "Thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived," signifies no more, but that he had mistaken the promise of God to him, who when he gave him his commission, told him he would be with him, by which he understood that no evil should come to him, and "now he was become a derision, and the people mocked him;" and in his passion and weakness he breaks forth into this expression, "thou hast deceived me, and I was deceived," whereas it was his own mistake of the meaning

meaning of God's promise, which was not that he should not meet with scorn, and opposition, and persecution, but that they should not prevail against him, as you may see at the latter end of the first chapter.

Second objection against the faithfulness of God as to performance of his promise. It is objected, that God did not give the children of Israel all the land which he promised to Abraham; as will appear by comparing Gen. xviii. 19, 20. with Josh. xiii. 1. &c. and Judg. ii. 20, 21. Gen. xv. 18. God promised to give Abraham and his seed such a land, the bounds whereof he describes Josh. xiii. 1. 'Tis said there, that "there remained very much land" yet unconquered, which they had not got the possession of. And Judg. ii. 20. it is said, that the people having not performed their part of the covenant, God would suspend the farther performance of his promise, and would not drive out any more of the nations before them; and it is probable that the Israelites never were possessed of the promised land in the full latitude and extent of the promise.

Ans. This covenant of God with Abraham, was upon consideration of his past faith and obedience, though it seems the full performance of it did likewise depend upon the future obedience of his posterity; in pursuance of this covenant, notwithstanding all the murmurings and rebellions of that people, God did bring them into the promised land, though "they provoked him to destroy them many a time; " because he remembered his covenant with Abraham;" when they were possessed of it, God gave them a title to the rest, and would have assisted them in the conquest of it, if they had performed the condition required on their part, that is, continued faithful and obedient to him: but they did not,
and

and thereby discharged God from any further performance of his promise; and God, when he had done this, had fully performed the covenant he made with Abraham, so far as concerned his part, as appears by the acknowledgment of Joshua, even in a time when a great part of the land was unconquered, Josh. xxi. 44. and of Solomon, 1 Kings viii. 56. yea, and had it not been that God had made this covenant, as well upon consideration of Abraham's faith and obedience, as upon condition of the future obedience of his posterity, the rebellions and disobedience of the people in the wilderness had released God wholly from the promise; and he had not been unfaithful if "he had destroyed utterly that people, "and made a full end of them," and they had never entred into that land; because a failure of the condition doth make the obligation to cease: and that this condition was implied in this covenant with Abraham, appears by these texts, Deut. vii. 12, 13. xi. 22, 23, 32. and Judg. ii. 20, 21. God gives this reason why he suspended the complete performance of his promise; "The anger of the LORD was hot against Israel, and he said, Because that this people hath transgressed my covenant which I commanded their fathers, and have not hearkened to my voice, I also will not henceforth drive out any from before them, of the nations which Joshua left when he died."

Third objection: God is not punctual in performing his threatenings; as when he threatened Adam, Gen. ii. 17. "In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die;" which yet was not accomplished, for he lived many hundred years after. God threatened Ahab "to bring evil upon him, and his family," 1 Kings xxi. 21. But, upon his humili-

ation, he is pleased to respite it, ver. 29. So God threatned Hezekiah with death, but, upon his prayer, "adds fifteen years to his life." 2 Kings xx. Thus Nineveh was threatened, but, upon their repentance, "God repented of the evil," Jon. iii. 10. Now how is this deferring and turning away of judgment consistent with the truth of God? doth not this seem to charge him with falshood or levity?

Ans. This may be said in general, that every one that understands the nature of God, cannot but be very well assured, that falshood and levity are very far from God; and though he could not untie some particular knots, and answer all difficulties, yet he ought to rest satisfied in this assurance. I confess this objection is troublesome, and requires a distinct consideration. I will not be peremptory in nice matters, but I shall, with submission, offer these things in answer to it.

I. As for the expression of God's repenting, we are to understand it, as many others in scripture, after the manner of men, and spoken by way of condescension to our weakness, and accommodated to our capacities, and not as casting any imputation of falshood or inconstancy upon God, as if either he did not intend what he saith, or out of levity did alter his mind. When God is said to repent, the expression only signifies thus much, that God doth not execute that which seemed to us to have been his purpose, that he is pleased to do otherwise than his threatenings seemed openly to express, because of some tacit condition implied in them; and this doth not derogate either from the truth, or sincerity, or constancy of God, in his word. Not from his truth; for he speaks what he intends really, if something did not intervene to prevent the judgment threatened;
upon

upon which he was resolved, when he threatened, to be taken off, and stop his judgments : nor doth it derogate from his sincerity and plainness ; for he hath told us that his threatenings have such conditions implied in them : nor doth it derogate from the constancy and immutability of God ; because God doth not *mutare consilium*, *sed sententiam* ; he doth not change his counsel and purpose, but takes off the sentence, which he had passed with reserved conditions.

2. As to the instances, that I may give more particular satisfaction to them, I shall consider the threatenings of God with this double respect, either with relation to a law, or with relation to the event ; with relation to a law, as they are the sanction of it ; or with relation to the event, as they are predictions of something to come.

(1.) Some threatenings have only relation to a law, as they are the sanction of it. And thus considered, they differ from promises ; for promises confer a right, *omne promissum cadit in debitum* ; but a threatening doth not convey any right, nor, if forborn, can the party complain of wrong done to him ; and therefore, in this case, it can only signify what the offence against the law deserves, and what the offender may expect ; for the end of threatening is not punishment, but the avoiding of it. And this may answer the first instance. God gave Adam a law ; and, by way of sanction, not of prediction of an event, he threatened the breach of it with death : now God did not execute the punishment threatened at the time threatened, but deferred it, and this without any impeachment of his justice or truth, because this threatening was only the sanction of the law.

(2.) We may consider threatenings with relation to the event, and as predictions; and as to the accomplishment of these, there seems to be a greater degree of necessity, because the honour of God's knowledge, and power, and truth seem to be concerned in them; for if his word be not fulfilled, it must either be for want of knowledge to foresee events, or power to bring them to pass, or constancy to his word. Now if we consider threatenings with respect to the event, as they are predictions of future judgments, I think all the other instances may be satisfied, by laying down this rule for the understanding of them, viz. "That all prophetic threatenings or predictions of judgments are to be understood with this tacit condition, if there do not intervene the humiliation, and repentance, and prayer of the persons against whom the judgment is threatened; and if so, God may, upon repentance, without any impeachment of the honour of his truth, or knowledge, or power, either defer, or abate, or remit the punishment." And that the predictions of judgments are to be understood with this condition, appears clearly from that known text, Jer. xviii. 7, 8.

I come now to the last thing I proposed, to make some use of this doctrine.

First, If God be a "God of truth," then this gives us assurance that he doth not deceive us, that the faculties which he hath given us are not false; but when they have clear perceptions of things, they do not err and mistake. Were it not for the veracity of God, we might, for any thing we know, be under a constant delusion; and no man could demonstrate the contrary, but that this is our make, and our temper, and the very frame of our understanding-

understandings, to be then most of all deceived, when we think our selves to be most certain; I say, no man could be assured of the contrary, but from hence, because veracity and truth is a divine perfection; and therefore God cannot be the author of error and deception. Therefore we may be assured, that the frame of our understanding is not a cheat, but that our faculties, are true, and unless it be our own fault, we need not be deceived in things that are necessary to our happiness.

Secondly, If God be “a God of truth,” then there is reason why we should believe and assent to whatever we are satisfied is revealed to us by God. A divine revelation is a sufficient ground for the most firm assent; for this very thing, that any thing is revealed by God, is the highest evidence, and ought to give us the most firm assurance of the truth of it. Hence it is, that the word of God is called “the word of truth,” yea, and “truth itself,” John xvii. 17. “Thy word is truth.”

Therefore whoever entertains the scriptures as the word of God, and is satisfied of the divine authority of them, ought, in reason, to believe every thing contained in them, yea, though there be some things of which no reasonable account can be given, and which our reason and understanding cannot give us particular satisfaction in; yet, because we are satisfied that they are revealed by God, “who cannot lie,” whose knowledge is infallible, and whose word is true, we ought, upon this higher and superior reason, to yield a firm assent to the truth of them: if we do not, we dishonour this perfection of God, and rob him of this essential property, his veracity. 1 John v. 10. “he that believeth on the son of God, hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not
“ God,

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“ God, hath made him a liar, because he believed not the record that God gave of his son.” And on the other hand, if we do believe what God hath revealed, we glorify this perfection of his, and set our seal to his veracity. So it is said of Abraham Rom. iv. 20. That “ he was strong in faith, giving glory to God.” And St. John the baptist, speaking concerning our SAVIOUR, faith, John iii. 33. “ He that hath received his testimony, hath set to his seal, that God is true.”

Thirdly, if God be “ a God of truth,” and faithful in performing his promise, then here is a firm foundation for our hope and trust. If God have made any promise, we may securely rely upon it, that it shall be made good; we may “ hold fast” our hope “ without wavering, because he is faithful who hath promised,” Heb. x. 23. Hence it is that the blessings of God’s covenant are called “ sure mercies,” Isa. lv. 3.

We attribute much to the word of a faithful friend, and look upon the promise of an honest man as very good security; but men may fail us when we rely upon them: but “ God is true,” though “ all men should prove liars.” Men are fickle and mutable; but the nature of God is fixed, he cannot fail those that trust in him. When God hath made any promise to us, we may plead it with him, and urge him with his faithfulness. So we find David did, 2 Sam. vii. 25, &c.

Only we should be careful to perform the condition which is required on our part, Heb. iv. 1. we should “ take heed, lest a promise being left us, any one should come short of it,” by not performing the condition; for that doth release and discharge him of the promise; and he is faithful, though he doth

both not perform what he promised, because he did not promise, but upon condition : and this seems to be the meaning of those words, 2 Tim. ii. 13. " If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful, he cannot deny himself." He said before, that if we perform the conditions required, God will bestow the blessings promised : " it is a faithful saying ; for if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him ; if we suffer, we shall also reign with him : but if we deny him," the curse threatened will then take place, and " he will deny us," and God is not unfaithful in doing this, he does not deny himself.

Now if we have such assurance, we may trust him with our greatest concerns, and venture our souls with him : Psal. xxxi. 5. " Into thine hand I commit my spirit ; thou hast redeemed me, O LORD GOD of truth. We should rely upon him, when there are the greatest improbabilities of the accomplishment of his promises. Thus did Abraham, Rom. iv. 17, &c.

This should make us also " patient in hope : " if a promise be not speedily accomplished, we should not be dejected or disquieted. David challengeth himself upon this account, Psal. xlii. 11. " Why art thou cast down, O, my soul ? and why art thou disquieted within me ? Hope thou in God ; for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

Fourthly, the truth of God is matter of terror to the wicked. All the threatenings of temporal evils may justly be expected, because their sins deserve them, and there is no condition implied in them, upon which thou canst reasonably hope for the avoiding or abating of the evils threatened, but of humiliation and repentance ; and if, notwithstanding these threatenings,

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threatenings, thou continuest in thy sins, and “blest thyself, saying, I shall have peace, though thou walk in the imaginations of thy heart;” by this very thing thou provokest the justice of God, “not to spare thee,” and makest “his wrath and his jealousy to smoke against thee;” and if thou continuest impenitent, however he may defer the execution of temporal evils, his truth and veracity is concerned to inflict eternal punishments upon thee; for “he hath sworn in his wrath,” that such “shall not enter into his rest.”

Fifthly, let us propound to ourselves the truth of God for our pattern and imitation, would you be like God? be true and faithful. Truth and faithfulness are divine perfections; but lying and falsehood are the properties of the devil, and the predominant qualities of hell. The character of the devil is, that “he abode not in the truth, and there is no truth in him; when he speaketh a lie, it is of his own; for he is a liar, and the father of it.” John viii. 44.

One of the most natural notions that we have of religion, is that it is to imitate God, and to endeavour to be like him, so far as we are capable; and to contradict any of the divine excellencies and perfections, is the highest sin; because it is against the clearest dictates of our mind, and contrary to those principles which are most deeply rooted in our nature. No man can be cruel and unmerciful, false and treacherous, without a very high degree of guilt; because these sins are contrary to the chiefest and most essential perfections of God. Lying is a sin that would fly in the face of an heathen, because it directly contradicts those natural notions which every man hath of God and religion; therefore we find that these

There is hardly any thing that men are more ashamed of, than to be taken in a lie, and it is esteemed the highest reproach to be charged with it; it argues such a direct contrariety to that which is the rule of perfection, "the nature of God," and consequently so much imperfection and baseness; he that tells a lie out of fear, is at once bold towards God, and base towards men.

Upon these accounts God expresseth himself highly offended with those that practise lying and falsehood, and to have a detestation of them; Prov. xii. 22. "Lying lips are an abomination to the LORD." It renders us unlike to him; Eph. iv. 24, 25. "Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness (or in the holiness of truth.)" And from hence he infers, "wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth to his neighbour: for we are members one of another." Col. iii. 9, 10. "Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge, after the image of him that created him:" that is, because we profess to be conformed to the image of God. More particularly, we should charge our selves with truth and faithfulness towards God and men.

I. **Towards God,** in our oaths, and vows, and covenants. In our oaths, when we swear in any matter, we tell God that what we speak is truth, and invoke him to bear witness to it. To falsify in an oath is one of the most solemn affronts that we can put upon the God of truth.

And so in our vows, which are a solemn promise to God, of such things in which we have no precedent obligation lying upon us. He that regardeth

truth will neither be rash in making a vow, nor careless to perform it. Eccles. v. 4. "When thou vowest a vow to God, defer not to pay it, for he hath no pleasure in fools." Not to perform what we have vowed, is an argument of folly; either of rashness in the making of it, or of inconstancy in not keeping it.

So likewise in all our covenants with God, to serve him and obey him, and keep his commandments, we should directly charge our selves with performance of these. There is a natural obligation upon us to these things from the very law of our creation, though we should never solemnly make any such promise, nor enter into any such engagements, because it is a tacit condition of our beings: but the taking of this covenant solemnly upon us in baptism, strengthens the obligation, and makes our unfaithfulness the greater sin. All our hopes of happiness are founded in the faithfulness of God; and if thou be false to him, how canst thou expect he should be faithful to thee? It is true indeed, that "he abides faithful, he cannot deny himself;" but if thou hast any ingenuity in thee, this should be an argument to thee to be faithful to him; I am sure this can be no encouragement to thee to be unfaithful: for if thou breakest the covenant thou hast entered into, and neglectest the conditions upon which God hath suspended the performance of his promise, thou dischargest the obligation on his part.

2. Towards men: we should charge our selves with truth in all our words, and faithfulness in all our promises. It becomes us who worship "the God of truth," to speak truth; to use plainness and sincerity in all our words, to abhor falshood and dissimulation, and those more refined ways of lying

by equivocation of words, and secret reservations of
our minds, on purpose to deceive. Those that plead
for these, it is a sign they do not understand the na-
ture of God, and of religion; which is, to conform
our selves to the divine perfections. We meet with
many complaints in the old testament, of the want
of truth and faithfulness among men, Psal. xii. 1, 2.
Isa. lix. 13, 14, 15. Jer. vii. 2, 8, 9. ii. 4, 5, 6. Hof.
vi. 1. I am afraid there is as much reason for this
complaint now; for we live in an age of greater
light, which doth reprove and make manifest this
work of darkness; and methinks there is no sadder
sign of the decay of Christianity, and of the little
power and influence that the gospel hath upon us,
than that there is so little regard had by Christians to
these moral duties, which, because moral, (how-
ever men may slight that word) are therefore of eter-
nal and indispensable obligation, having their foun-
dation in the nature of God.

To conclude all: that man that can dispense with
himself as to moral duties, that makes no conscience
of telling a lie, or breaking his word, what badge
soever he may wear, what title soever he may call
himself by, it is as impossible that such a man should
be a true Christian, as it is to reconcile "the God of
truth," and "the father of lies."

S E R M O N CXLII

The holiness of God.

1 P E T. i. 16.

*Be ye holy, for I am holy.*S E R M.
CLXII.

IN speaking to this attribute, I shall,
I. Inquire, what we are to understand by the holiness of God.

II. Endeavour to shew, that this perfection belongs to God.

I. What we are to understand by the holiness of God. There is some difficulty in fixing the proper notion of it; for though there be no property more frequently attributed to God, in scripture, than this of holiness, yet there is none of all God's attributes, which divines have spoken more sparingly of, than this.

The general notion of holiness is, that it is a separation from a common and ordinary, to a peculiar and excellent use. And this notion of holiness is applicable either to things or persons. To things; thus the vessels of the tabernacle, and the vestments of the priests, were said to be holy, because they were separated from common use, and appropriated to the peculiar and excellent use of the service of God. Holiness of persons is two-fold; either relative and external, which signifies the peculiar relation of a person to God; such were called, *sepiis*, priests, or holy men: or else habitual and inherent; such is the holiness of good men, and it is a separation from moral imperfection, that is, from sin and impurity:

purity : and this is called *ᾀσιότης*, and the primary notion of it is negative, and signifies the absence and remotion of sin. And this appears in those explanations which the scripture gives of it. Thus it is explained by opposition to sin and impurity, 2 Cor. vii. 1. "Let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness ;" where holiness is opposed to all filthiness. Sometimes by the negation of sin and defilement. So we find holy, and without blame put together, Eph. i. 4. "holy and without blemish," Eph. v. 27. "holy, harmless, and undefiled," Heb. vii. 26. It is true, indeed, this negative notion doth imply something that is positive ; it doth not only signify the absence of sin, but a contrariety to it ; we cannot conceive the absence of sin, without the presence of grace ; as, take away crookedness from a thing, and it immediately becomes strait. When ever we are made holy, every lust and corruption in us is supplanted by the contrary grace.

Now this habitual holiness of persons, which consists in a separation from sin, is a conformity to the holiness of God ; and by this we may come to understand what holiness in God is : and it signifies the peculiar eminency of the divine nature, whereby it is separated and removed at an infinite distance from moral imperfection, and that which we call sin ; that is, there is no such thing as malice, or envy, or hatred, or revenge, or impatience, or cruelty, or tyranny, or injustice, or falshood, or unfaithfulness in God ; or if there be any other thing that signifies sin, and vice, and moral imperfection, holiness signifies that the divine nature is at an infinite distance from all these, and possessed of the contrary perfections.

Therefore all those texts that remove moral imperfection

perfection from God, and declare the repugnancy of it to the divine nature, do set forth the holiness of God. Jam. i. 13. "God cannot be tempted with evil." Job viii. 3. "Doth God pervert judgment, or doth the Almighty pervert justice?" Job xxxiv. 10, 12. "Far be it from God that he should do wickedness, and from the Almighty, that he should commit iniquity. Yea, surely, God will not do wickedly, neither will the Almighty pervert judgment." Rom. ix. 14. "Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid." Zeph. iii. 5. "The just LORD is in the midst thereof, he will not do iniquity." And so falsehood, and unfaithfulness, and inconstancy, Deut. xxxii. 4. "A God of truth, and without iniquity." 1 Sam. xv. 29. "The strength of Israel will not lie." Tit. i. 2. "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, hath promised." Heb. vi. 18. "That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie." Therefore you shall find, that holiness is joined with all the moral perfections of the divine nature, or put for them. Hos. xi. 9. "I am the holy One in the midst of thee;" that is, "the merciful One." Psal. cxlv. 17. "The LORD is righteous in all his ways, and holy in all his works." Rom. vii. 12. "The commandment is holy, and just, and good." Rev. iii. 7. "These things saith he that is holy, he that is true." Rev. vi. 10. "How long, O LORD, holy and true?" Psalm cv. 42. "He remembered his holy promise," holy, that is, in respect of the faithfulness of it. Isaiah lv. 3. "The sure mercies of David; *τὰ ὄσια*, the holy mercies of David," which will not fail.

So that the holiness of God is not a particular, but an universal perfection, and runs through all the moral

moral perfections of the divine nature; it is the beauty of the divine nature, and the perfection of all his other perfections: take away this, and you bring an universal stain and blemish upon the divine nature; without holiness, power would be an oppression; and wisdom, subtilty; and sovereignty, tyranny; and goodness, malice and envy; and justice, cruelty; and mercy, foolish pity; and truth, falsehood. And therefore the scripture speaks of this, as God's highest excellency and perfection. God is said to be "glorious in holiness:" Exod. xv. 11. Holiness is called God's throne. Psal. xlvii. 8. "He sitteth upon the throne of his holiness." This is that which makes heaven. Isaiah lxiii. 15. It is called, "the habitation of his holiness, and of his glory;" as if this were the very nature of God, and the sum of his perfections. The knowledge of God is called "the knowledge of the holy One." Prov. ix. 10. "To be made partakers of a divine nature," and "to be made partakers of God's holiness," are equivalent expressions. 2 Pet. iii. 4. Heb. xii. 10. And because there is no perfection of God greater, therefore he is represented as swearing by this; Psal. lx. 6. "God hath spoken in his holiness. Psal. lxxxix. 35. "Once have I sworn by my holiness." The angels and glorified spirits they sum up the perfections of God in this, Isa. vi. 3. "And one cried unto another, and said, holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory." Rev. iv. 8. "And they rest not day and night, saying, holy, holy, holy, LORD GOD almighty, which was, and is, and is to come." There is no attribute of God so often repeated as this; in some copies it is nine times.

II. I shall endeavour to prove, that this perfection belongs to GOD :

First, from the light of nature. The philosophers, in all their discourses of GOD, agree in this, that whatever sounds like vice and imperfection, is to be separated from the divine nature ; which is to acknowledge his holiness. Plato, speaking of our likeness to GOD, saith, *ὁμοίωσις δὲ δίκαιον καὶ ὅσιον μετὰ φρονήσεως γενέσθαι*. Dan. iv. 9. King Nebuchadnezzar calls GOD by this title, " I know that " the spirit of the holy gods is in thee." In a word, whatever hath been produced to prove any of GOD's moral perfections, proves his holiness.

Secondly, from scripture. There is no title more frequently given to GOD, in scripture, and so often ingeminated, as this of his holiness. He is called holiness itself, Isa. lxiii. 15. Where heaven is called " the habitation of his holiness," that is, of GOD. His name is said to be holy, Luke i. 49. " And " holy is his name." He is called " the holy One," Isaiah xl. 25. " The holy One of Israel," Isaiah xli. 20. " The holy One of Jacob," xlix. 23. He is said to be " holy in all his works and promises." Psal. cv. 42. " In all his ways and works," Psal. cxlv. 17. This title is given to each of the three persons in the blessed Trinity : to GOD the father in innumerable places : to GOD the son, Dan. ix. 24. " To anoint the most holy." The devil cannot deny him this title, Luke iv. 34. " I know thee who " thou art, the holy One of GOD : " and the Spirit of GOD hath this title constantly given it, the holy Ghost, or the holy Spirit, or the Spirit of holiness. The scripture attributes this perfection in a peculiar manner to GOD, 1 Sam. ii. 2. " There is none holy " as the LORD." Rev. xv. 4. " For thou only art holy."

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holy." Holiness is a communicable perfection ;
no creature can partake of it in such a manner and
degree as the divine nature possesseth it. God is
essentially holy, the fountain of holiness ; the creatures
are derivatively and by participation holy. God is
eminently and transcendently so ; the creatures, in a
finite degree. God is immutably so, it is impossible
that he should be otherwise ; but no creature is out of an
absolute possibility of sin. In this sense it is said, Job
18. That " he putteth no trust in his servants ;
and his angels he charged with folly." And
chap. xv. 15. He putteth no trust in his saints ;
yea, the heavens are not clean in his sight."
From all which I shall draw these inferences.

If holiness be a perfection of the divine nature, and
a property of God ; if, in the notion of God, there
be included an everlasting separation and distance
from moral imperfection, an eternal repugnance to
sin and iniquity ; from hence we may infer, that
there is an intrinsecal good and evil in things ; and
the reasons and respects of moral good and evil do
not depend upon any mutable, and inconstant, and
arbitrary principle, but are fixed and immutable, eter-
nal and indispensable. Therefore they do not seem
to me to speak so safely, who make the divine will,
precisely and abstractedly considered, the rule of mo-
ral good and evil ; as if there were nothing good or
evil in it's own nature antecedently to the will of
God, but that all things are therefore good or evil,
because God wills them to be so : for if this were so,
goodness, and righteousness, and truth, and faith-
fulness, would not be essential, and necessary, and
immutable properties of the divine nature, but ac-
cidental, and arbitrary, and uncertain, and mutable ;
which is to suppose that God, if he pleased, might

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be otherwise than good, and just, and true. For if these depend merely upon the will of God, and be not necessary or essential properties of the divine nature, then the contrary of these, malice, and envy, and unrighteousness, and falsehood do not imply any essential repugnancy to the divine nature; which is plainly contrary to what the scripture tells us, that "God cannot be tempted with evil;" that "it is impossible he should lie," that he "cannot be unrighteous."

If any man say that God hath now declared himself to be just, and good, and faithful, and now he cannot be otherwise, because "he is a God of truth," "and he changeth not;" this is to grant the thing: for this supposeth the veracity and immutability of God to be essential and necessary perfections of the divine nature; and why not justice and goodness as well? I say, it supposeth veracity and immutability to be essential perfections, and not to depend upon the will of God; that is, that God cannot will to be otherwise than true and unchangeable: for if he could, what assurance can we possibly have, but that when he declares himself to be good, and just, he is, or may be otherwise?

But I need not insist upon this, which seems to be so very clear, and to carry it's own evidence along with it. I will only use this argument to prove it, and so leave it. No being can will it's own nature, and essential perfections, that is, chuse whether it will be thus, or otherwise; for that were to suppose it to be before it is, and before it hath a being, to deliberate about it's own nature. Therefore, if this be the nature of God, (which, I think, no body will deny) to be good, and just, and true, and necessarily to be what he is; then goodness, and justice, and truth

truth do not depend upon the will of God, but there are such things, such notions antecedently to any act of the divine will. And this does no way prejudice the liberty of God; for this is the highest perfection, to be necessarily good, and just, and true; and a liberty or possibility to be otherwise is impotency and imperfection. For liberty no where speaks perfection, but where the things and actions about which it is conversant are indifferent; in all other things it is the highest perfection not to be free and indifferent, but immutable and fixed, and necessarily bound up by the eternal laws of goodness, and justice, and truth, so that it shall not be possible to swerve from them; and this is the perfection of the divine nature, which we call his holiness.

2. If holiness be the chief excellency and perfection of the divine nature, this shews us what account we are to make of sin, and wickedness, and vice. We may judge of every privation by the habit, for they bear an exact proportion one to another. Light and darkness are opposed, as habit and privation; if light be pleasant and comfortable, then darkness is dismal and horrid. And so holiness and sin are opposed: if holiness be the highest perfection of any nature, then sin is the grand imperfection, and the lowest debasement of any being; because it is the most opposite to that, and at the furthest distance from that which is the first excellency and perfection.

This should rectify our judgment and esteem of things and persons. We admire and esteem riches, and power, and greatness; and we scorn and condemn poverty, and weakness, and meanness; yea, grace and holiness, if it be in the company of these. We are apt to reverence and value the great, and the rich, and the mighty of this world, though they be

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wicked, and to despise the poor man's wisdom and holiness; but we make a false judgment of things and persons. There is nothing that can be a foundation of respect, that ought to command our reverence and esteem, but real worth, and excellency, and perfection; and according to the degrees of this, we ought to bestow our respect, and raise our esteem. What St. James saith of respect of persons, I may apply in this case, Jam. ii. 4. "Are ye not then partial in your selves, and become judges of evil thoughts?" We are extremely partial; we make a false judgment, and reason ill concerning things, when we admire gilded vices, and wickedness exalted to high places; I mean, ungodly rich men, and ungodly great men; for wicked men are properly ungodly, unlike to God, and when we contemn poor, and mean, and afflicted holiness and piety. Were but our eyes open, and our judgment clear and unprejudiced, we should see a beauty and resplendency in goodness; even when it is under the greatest disadvantage, when it is clothed with rags, and sits upon a dunghill, it would shine through all these mists, and we should see a native light and beauty in it, through the darkness of a poor and low condition: and we should see wickedness to be a most vile and abject thing, when it appears in all its gallantry and bravery; we should look upon the poor righteous man, as "more excellent than his neighbour;" and the profane gallant, as the "off-scouring of the earth." We should value a man that "does justice, and loves mercy, and speaks the truth to his neighbour;" we should esteem any one more upon the account of any one of these simple qualities, than we should another man destitute of these, upon the account of an hundred titles of honour, and

ten thousand acres of land. A wicked, unholy man, he is a vile person, who deserves to be contemned; and an holy man, he is the right honourable; Psal. xv. 4. "In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD." The vile person is opposed to him that fears the LORD. He that is bold to affront God, and sin against him, is the base and ignoble person. God himself, who is possessed of all excellency and perfection, and therefore knows best how to judge of these, he tells us, how we should value our selves and others, Jer. ix. 23, 24. "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might; let not the rich man glory in his riches: but let him that glorieth, glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise loving-kindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth; for in these things I delight, saith the LORD." To know these divine qualities and perfections, signifies here, to understand them so as to imitate them. I do not speak this, to bring down the value of any that are advanced in this world, or to lessen the respect which is due to them; I would have nothing undervalued but wickedness and vice: and I would have those who have store of worldly advantages to recommend them, to add religion to their riches, and holiness to their honour, that they may be current for their intrinsic value, rather than for the image and picture of worth which the world hath stamped upon them.

3. If holiness be the chief excellency and perfection of the divine nature, then what an absurd and unreasonable thing is it, to scorn and despise holiness, to mock and deride men under this very title!

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The world is much blinded, that they do not see the great evil of sin, and the beauty and excellency of holiness: but that men should be so infatuated, as to change the nature of things, and to mistake things of so vast difference, as sin, and holiness; to “call “good evil, and evil good;” that sin, which is the vilest thing in the world, should be esteemed and cherished, accounted a piece of gallantry, and reckoned amongst the excellencies and accomplishments of human nature; and holiness, which is so great a perfection, should be a name of hatred and disgrace, to be contemned and persecuted; that that which is the glory of heaven, and the most radiant perfection of the divine nature, should be matter of scorn and contempt; as the apostle speaks in another case, “behold! ye despisers, and wonder, and perish.” Do ye think the holy and just God will put up these affronts and indignities? Ye do not only despise men, but ye despise God also. You cannot condemn that which God accounts his glory, without reviling the divine nature, and offering despite to God himself. The malice reacheth heaven, and is levelled against God, whenever ye slight holiness.

4. If God be a holy God, and hath such a repugnancy in his nature to sin, then this is matter of terror to wicked men. The holy God cannot but hate sin, and be an enemy to wickedness; and the hatred of God is terrible. We dread the hatred of a great man; because where hatred is backed with power, the effects of it are terrible. But the hatred of the almighty and eternal God, is much more dreadful, because the effects of it are greater, and more lasting, than of the hatred of a weak mortal man. We know the utmost they can do; “they can but kill the body;”

“dy; after that, they have no more that they can
 “do:” they cannot hurt our souls; they cannot
 follow us beyond the grave, and pursue us into another world: but the effects of God’s hatred and displeasure are mighty and lasting, they extend themselves to all eternity; for who knoweth the power of his anger? Who can tell the utmost of what omnipotent justice can do to sinners? “It is a dreadful thing
 “to fall into the hands of the living God;” because he that lives for ever, can punish for ever. We are miserable, if God do not love us. Those words, “my soul shall have no pleasure in him,” signify great misery, and express a dreadful curse: but it is a more positive expression of misery, for God to hate us; that signifies ruin and destruction to the utmost; Psal. v. 4. “Thou art not a God that
 “hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil
 “dwell with thee.” This is a *μείωσις*, and expresseth less than is intended. God is far from being of an indifferent negative temper towards sin and wickedness; therefore the psalmist adds, “thou hatest all
 “the workers of iniquity; and then, in the next verse, to shew what is the effect of God’s hatred,
 “thou shalt destroy them that speak leasing.” Therefore, sinner, fear and tremble at the thoughts of God’s holiness.

5. Imitate the holiness of God: this is the inference here in the text, “be ye holy, for I am holy.” Holiness, in one word, contains all the imitable perfections of God: and when it is said, “be ye holy;” it is as much as if he had said, be ye good, and patient, and merciful, and true, and faithful; for I am so. Therefore religion is called “the knowledge
 “of the holy One,” Prov. ix. 10. and chap. xxx.

6. And our imitation of God is expressed by our
 “putting

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“ putting on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness,” Eph. iv. 24. Seeing then this is the chief excellency and perfection of God, and the sum of all the perfections which we are to imitate, and wherein we are to endeavour to be like God, let us conform our selves to the holy God; endeavour to be habitually holy, which is our conformity to the nature of God; and actually holy, which is our conformity to the will of God. I will not enlarge upon this, because I have pressed the imitation of these particular perfections, goodness, patience, justice, truth, and faithfulness upon other texts. I shall only mention two arguments, to excite and quicken our desires and endeavour after holiness.

1. Holiness is an imitation of the highest excellency and perfection. Holiness, I told you, signifies a separation from sin and vice, and all moral imperfection, and, consequently, doth comprehend and take in all the moral perfections of the divine nature, the goodness, and mercy, and patience, and justice, and veracity, and faithfulness of God; now these are the very beauty and glory of the divine nature. The first thing that we attribute to God, next to his being, is his goodness, and those other attributes which have a necessary connection with it; his greatness and majesty is nothing else but the glory which results from his united perfections, especially from his goodness, and those perfections which are akin to it. Separate from God these perfections, which holiness includes in it, and what would be left but an omnipotent evil, an eternal being, infinitely knowing, and infinitely able to do mischief? which is as plain and notorious a contradiction, and as impossible a thing, as can be imagined: so that if we have any sparks

of

of ambition in us, we cannot but aspire after holiness, which is so great an excellency and perfection of God himself. There is a vulgar prejudice against holiness, as if it were a poor, mean thing, and below a great and generous spirit; whereas holiness is the only true greatness of mind, the most genuine nobility, and the highest gallantry of spirit; and however it be despised by men, it is of a heavenly extraction, and divine original. Holiness is the first part of the character of "the wisdom that is from above;" Jam. iii. 17. "the wisdom that is from above, is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy."

2. Holiness is an essential and principal ingredient of happiness. Holiness is a state of peace and tranquillity, and the very frame and temper of happiness; and without it, the divine nature, as it would be imperfect, so it would be miserable. If the divine nature were capable of envy, or malice, or hatred, or revenge, or impatience, or cruelty, or injustice, or unfaithfulness, it would be liable to vexation and discontent, than which nothing can be a greater disturbance of happiness: so that holiness is necessary to our felicity and contentment; not only to the happiness of the next life, but to our present peace and contentment. If reasonable creatures could be happy, as brute beasts are in their degree, by enjoying their depraved appetites, and following the dictates of sense and fancy, God would not have bound us up to a law and rule, but hath left us as he hath done unreasonable creatures, to satisfy our lusts and appetites, without check and controul: but angels and men, which are reasonable creatures, have the notions of good and evil, of right and wrong, of come-

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lines and filthiness, so woven and twisted into their very natures, that they can never be wholly defaced, without the ruin of their beings; and therefore it is impossible that such creatures should be happy otherwise, than by complying with these notions, and obeying the natural dictates and suggestions of their minds; which if they neglect, and go against, they will naturally feel remorse and torment in their own spirits; their minds will be uneasy and unquiet, and they will be inwardly grieved and displeased with themselves for what they have done. So the apostle tells us, Rom. i. that even the most degenerate heathens had consciences, which did accuse or excuse them, according as they obeyed, or did contrary to the dictates of natural light. God therefore, who knows our frame, hath so adapted his law to us, which is the rule of holiness, that if we live up to it, we shall avoid the unspeakable torment of a guilty conscience; whereas, if we do contrary to it, we shall always be at discord with our selves, and in a perpetual disquiet of mind: for nothing can do contrary to the law of it's being, that is, to it's own nature, without displeasure and reluctance; the consequence of which, in moral actions, is guilt; which is nothing else but the trouble and disquiet which ariseth in one's mind, from consciousness of having done something that contradicts the perfective principle of his being, that is, something which did not become him, and which, being what he is, that is, a reasonable creature, he ought not to do.

So that in all reasonable creatures there is a certain kind of temper and disposition that is necessary and essential to happiness, and that is holiness; which, as it is the perfection, so it is the great felicity of the divine nature: and, on the contrary, this is one

chief

chief part of the misery of those wicked, accursed spirits the devils, and of unholy men, that they are of a temper contrary to God, they are envious, and malicious, and wicked; that is, of such a temper as is naturally a torment and disquiet to itself: and here the foundation of hell is laid in the evil dispositions of our spirits; and till that be cured, which can only be done by holiness, it is as impossible for a wicked man to be happy and contented in himself, as it is for a sick man to be at ease; and the external presence of God, and local heaven, would signify no more to make a wicked man happy and contented, than heaps of gold, and concerts of musick, and a well-spread table, and a rich bed, would contribute to a man's ease in the paroxysms of a fever, or in a violent fit of the stone. If a sensual, or covetous, or ambitious man were in heaven, he would be like "the rich man in hell," he would be tormented with a continual thirst, and burnt up in the flames of his own ardent desires, and would not meet with the least drop of suitable pleasure and delight to quench and allay the heat: the reason is, because such a man hath that within him, which torments him, and he cannot be at ease till that be removed. Sin is the violent, and unnatural, and uneasy state of our soul; every wicked man's spirit is out of order, and till the man be put into a right frame by holiness, he will be perpetually disquieted, and can have no rest within himself. The prophet fitly describes the condition of such a person, Isa. lvii. 20, 21. "But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast forth mire and dirt: There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked." So long as a man is unholy, so long as filthiness and corruption abound in his heart, they will be

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restlessly working, like wine which is in a perpetual motion and agitation, till it have purged itself of it's dregs and foulness. Nothing is more turbulent and unquiet than the spirit of a wicked man; it is like the sea, when it roars and rages through the strength of contrary winds; it is the scene of furious lusts, and wild passions, which as they are contrary to holiness, so they maintain perpetual contests and feuds among themselves.

All sin separates us from God, who is the foundation of our happiness. Our limited nature, and the narrowness of our beings, will not permit us to be happy in our selves: it is peculiar to God to be his own happiness; but man, because he is finite, and therefore cannot be self-sufficient, is carried forth by an innate desire of happiness, to seek his felicity in God. So that there is in the nature of man a spring of restless motion, which, with great impatience, forceth him out of himself, and tosses him to and fro, till he comes to rest in something that is self-sufficient. Our souls, when they are separated from God, like the unclean spirit in the gospel, when it was cast out, "wander up and down in dry" and desert places, seeking rest, but finding none." Were the whole world calm about a man, and did it not make the least attempt upon him, were he free from the fears of divine vengeance, yet he could not be satisfied with himself; there is something within him that would not let him be at rest, but would tear him from his own foundation and consistency; so that when we are once broken off from God, the sense of inward want doth stimulate and force us to seek our contentment elsewhere. So that nothing but holiness, which re-unites us to God, and restores our souls to their primitive and original state, can make

make us happy, and give peace and rest to our souls: and this is the constant voice and language of scripture, and the tenor of the bible; "Acquaint now thy self with him, and be at peace," Job xxii. 21. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart," Psal. xcvii. 11. "The work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effect of righteousness, quietness and assurance for ever," Isa. xxxii. 17.

Seeing then holiness is so high a perfection, and so great a happiness, let these arguments prevail with us to aspire after this temper, that "as he who hath called us is holy, so we may be holy in all manner of conversation, because it is written, be ye holy, for I am holy."

S E R M O N CXLIII.

The goodness of God.

P S A L. cxlv. 9.

The LORD is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

TH E subject which I have now proposed to treat of, is certainly one of the greatest and noblest arguments in the world, the goodness of God; the highest and most glorious perfection of the best and most excellent of beings, than which nothing deserves more to be considered by us, nor ought in reason to affect us more. The goodness of
God

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GOD is the cause, and the continuance of our beings, the foundation of our hopes, and the fountain of our happiness; our greatest comfort, and our fairest example, the chief object of our love, and praise, and admiration, the joy and rejoicing of our hearts; and therefore the meditation and discourse of it must needs be pleasant and delightful to us: the great difficulty will be, to confine our selves upon so copious an argument, and to set bounds to that which is of so vast an extent, “the LORD is good to all, and “his tender mercies are over all his works.”

Which words are an argument, which the divine psalmist useth, to stir up himself and others to the praise of GOD: at the 3d verse he tells us, that “the LORD is great, and greatly to be praised;” and he gives the reason of this, verse 8. and 9. from those properties and perfections of the divine nature, which declare his goodness, “the LORD is gracious, and full of compassion, slow to anger, and “of great mercy: the LORD is good to all, and his “tender mercies are over all his works:” where you have the goodness of GOD declared, together with the amplitude and extent of it, in respect of the objects of it; “the LORD is good to all.”

In the handling of this argument, I shall do these four things:

First, consider what is the proper notion of goodness, as it is attributed to GOD.

Secondly, shew that this perfection belongs to GOD.

Thirdly, consider the effects and the extent of it.

Fourthly, answer some objections which may seem to contradict and bring in question the goodness of GOD.

First, what is the proper notion of goodness, as it is attributed to GOD.

There

There is a dry metaphysical notion of goodness, S E R M. CKLIH. which only signifies the being and essential properties of a thing: but this is a good word ill bestowed; for in this sense, every thing that hath being, even the devil himself, is good.

And there is a moral notion of goodness; and that is twofold:

1. More general, in opposition to all moral evil and imperfection, which we call sin and vice; and so the justice, and truth, and holiness of God are, in this sense, his goodness. But there is,

2. Another notion of moral goodness, which is more particular and restrained; and then it denotes a particular virtue, in opposition to a particular vice: and this is the proper and usual acceptation of the word goodness; and the best description I can give of it is this; that it is a certain propension and disposition of mind, whereby a person is inclined to desire and procure the happiness of others; and it is best understood by it's contrary, which is an envious disposition, a contracted and narrow spirit, which would confine happiness to it itself, and grudgeth that others should partake of it, or share in it; or a malicious and mischievous temper, which delights in the harms of others, and to procure trouble and mischief to them. To communicate and lay out ourselves for the good of others, is goodness; and so the apostle explains doing good, by communicating to others, who are in misery, or in want: Heb. xiii. 16. "but to do good, and to communicate, forget not." The Jews made a distinction between a righteous and a good man: to which the apostle alludes, Rom. v. 7. "scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die." The
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righteous

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righteous man was he that did no wrong to others : and the good man, he who was not only not injurious to others, but kind and beneficial to them. So that goodness is a readiness and disposition to communicate the good and happiness which we enjoy, and to be willing others should partake of it.

This is the notion of goodness among men ; and it is the same in God, only with this difference, that God is originally and transcendently good ; but the creatures are, the best of them, but imperfectly good, and by derivation from God, who is the fountain and original of goodness ; which is the meaning of our SAVIOUR, Luke xviii. 19. when he says, “ there is none good save one, that is, God.” But though the degrees of goodness in God, and the creatures, be infinitely unequal, and that goodness which is in us be so small and inconsiderable that, compared with the goodness of God, it does not deserve that name ; yet the essential notion of goodness in both must be the same ; else when the scripture speaks of the goodness of God, we could not know the meaning of it ; and if we do not at all understand what it is for God to be good, it is all one to us (for ought we know) whether he be good or not ; for he may be so, and we never the better for it, if we do not know what goodness in God is, and consequently when he is so, and when not.

Besides that, the goodness of God is very frequently in scripture propounded to our imitation ; but it is impossible for us to imitate that, which we do not understand what it is : from whence it is certain, that the goodness which we are to endeavour after, is the same that is in God ; because in this we are commanded to imitate the perfection of God, that is, to be good and merciful as he is, according

to

to the rate and condition of creatures, and so far as we, whose natures are imperfect, are capable of resembling the divine goodness. S E R M.
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Thus much for the notion of goodness in God; it is a propension and disposition in the divine nature, to communicate being and happiness to his creatures.

Secondly, I shall endeavour to shew, in the next place, that this perfection of goodness belongs to God; and that from these three heads.

I. From the acknowledgment of natural light.

II. From the testimony of scripture and divine revelation. And,

III. From the perfection of the divine nature.

I. From the acknowledgments of natural light. The generality of the heathens agree in it, and there is hardly any perfection of God more universally acknowledged by them. I always except the sect of the Epicureans, who attribute nothing but eternity and happiness to the divine nature; and yet if they would have considered it, happiness without goodness is impossible. I do not find that they do expressly deny this perfection to God, or that they ascribe to him the contrary; but they clearly take away all the evidence and arguments of the divine goodness; for they supposed God to be an immortal and happy being, that enjoyed himself, and had no regard to any thing without himself, that neither gave being to other things, nor concerned himself in the happiness or misery of any of them; so that their notion of a deity was, in truth, the proper notion of an idle being, that is called God, and neither does good nor evil.

But setting aside this atheistical sect, the rest of the heathens did unanimously affirm and believe the goodness of God; and this was the great foundation of their religion; and all their prayers to God,

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and praises of him, did necessarily suppose a persuasion of the divine goodness. Whosoever prays to God, must have a persuasion or good hopes of his readiness to do him good ; and to praise God, is to acknowledge that he hath received good from him. Seneca hath an excellent passage to this purpose, “ he “ (says he) that denies the goodness of God, does “ not, surely, consider the infinite number of pray- “ ers that, with hands lifted up to heaven, are put “ up to God, both in private and publick ; which “ certainly would not be, nor is it credible, that all “ mankind should conspire in this madness of putting “ up their supplications to deaf and impotent deities, “ if they did not believe that the gods were so good “ as to confer benefits upon those who prayed “ to them.”

But we need not infer their belief of God's goodness from the acts of their devotion, nothing being more common among them than expressly to attribute this perfection of goodness to him ; and among the divine titles, this always, had the pre-eminence, both among the Greeks and Romans ; *εὐς τε μέγας τε*, *Deus optimus maximus*, was their constant stile ; and in our language, the name of God seems to have been given him from his goodness. I might produce innumerable passages out of the heathen authors to this purpose ; but I shall only mention that remarkable one out of Seneca ; *primus deorum cultus est deos credere ; deinde reddere illis majestatem suam, reddere bonitatem, sine qua nulla majestas* : “ The “ first act of worship is to believe the being of God ; “ and the next, to ascribe majesty or greatness to “ him ; and to ascribe goodness, without which there “ can be no greatness.”

II. From the testimony of scripture, and divine revelation.

revelation. . I shall mention but a few of those many texts of scripture, which declare to us the goodness of God, *Exod. xxxiv. 6.* where God makes his name known to Moses; "The LORD, the LORD God, "merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth." *Psal. lxxxvi. 5.* "Thou, LORD, art good, and ready to forgive." *Psal. cxix. 68.* "Thou art good, and doest good." And that which is so often repeated in the book of Psalms; "O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is "good, and his mercy endureth for ever." Our blessed SAVIOUR attributes this perfection to God, in so peculiar and transcendent a manner, as if it were incommunicable, *Luke xviii. 19.* "There is none "good, save one, that is God." The meaning is, that no creature is capable of it, in that excellent and transcendent degree, in which the divine nature is possessed of it.

To the same purpose are those innumerable testimonies of scripture which declare God to be gracious, and merciful, and long-suffering: for these are but several branches of his goodness; his grace is the freeness of his goodness to those who have not deserved it: his mercy is his goodness to those who are in misery: his patience is his goodness to those who are guilty, in deferring the punishment due to them.

III. The goodness of God may likewise be argued from the perfection of the divine nature, these two ways:

1. Goodness is the chief of all perfections, and therefore it belongs to God.

2. There are some footsteps of it in the creatures, and therefore it is much more eminently in God.

1. Goodness is the highest perfection, and therefore it must needs belong to God, who is the most

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perfect of beings. Knowledge and power are great perfections ; but separated from goodness, they would be great imperfections, nothing but craft and violence. An angel may have knowledge and power in a great degree ; but yet, for all that, be a devil. Goodness is so great and necessary a perfection, that, without it, there can be no other ; it gives perfection to all other excellencies : take away this, and the greatest excellencies in any other kind, would be but the greatest imperfections : and therefore our SAVIOUR speaks of the goodness and mercy of God, as the sum of his perfections ; what one evangelist hath, “ be ye merciful, as your Father which is in heaven is merciful,” is rendered in another, “ be ye therefore perfect, as your Father which is in heaven is perfect.” Goodness is so essential to a perfect being, that if we once strip God of this property, we rob him of the glory of all his other perfections ; and therefore when Moses desired to see God’s glory, he said, “ he would make all his goodness to pass before him.” *Exod. xxxiii. 19.* This is the most amiable perfection, and, as it were, the beauty of the divine nature, *Zach. ix. 17.* “ how great is his goodness, and how great is his beauty?” *sine bonitate nulla majestas*, “ without goodness there can be no majesty.” Other excellencies may cause fear and amazement in us ; but nothing but goodness can command sincere love and veneration.

2. There are some footsteps of this perfection in the creatures, and therefore it must be much more eminently in God. There is in every creature some representation of some divine perfection or other ; but God doth not own any creature to be after his image, that is destitute of goodness. The creatures that want reason and understanding are incapable of this

This moral goodness we are speaking of; man is the first in the rank of creatures that is endowed with it, and he is said to be "made after the image of God, and to have dominion given him over the creatures below him;" to signify to us, that if man had not been made after God's image, in respect of goodness, he had been unfit to rule over other creatures; because, without goodness, dominion would be tyranny and oppression; and the more any creature partakes of this perfection of goodness, the more it resembles God; as the blessed angels, who "behold the face of God continually," and are thereby "transformed into his image, from glory to glory," their whole business and employment is, to do good; and the devil, though he resembles God in other perfections of knowledge and power, yet because he is evil, and envious, and mischievous, and so contrary to God in this perfection, he is the most opposite and hateful to him of all creatures whatsoever.

And if this perfection be in some degree in the creature, it is much more in God; if it be derived from him, he is much more eminently possessed of it himself. All that goodness which is in the best natured of the sons of men, or in the most glorious angels of heaven, is but an imperfect and weak representation of the divine goodness.

The third thing I proposed to consider, was, the effects of the divine goodness, together with the large extent of it, in respect of the objects of it: "the LORD is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works; thou art good, and doest good," says David, Psal. cxix. 68. The great evidence and demonstration of God's goodness, is from the effects of it. To the same purpose St. Paul speaks,

speaks, Acts xiv. 17. "He hath not left himself
" without witness, in that he doth good, and sendeth
" us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons."

I shall consider the effects of the divine goodness
under these two heads :

I. The universal extent of God's goodness to all
his creatures.

II. I shall consider more particularly the goodness
of God to men, which we are more especially con-
cerned to take notice of.

I. The universal extent of his goodness to the
whole creation ; " the LORD is good to all." The
whole creation furnisheth us with clear evidences and
demonstrations of the divine goodness ; which way-
soever we cast our eyes, we are encountered with un-
deniable instances of the goodness of God ; and every
thing that we behold, is a sensible demonstration of
it ; " the heavens declare the glory of God, and
" the firmament sheweth his handy-work," says the
Psalmist, Psal. xix. 1. And again, Psal. xxxiii. 5
" The earth is full of the goodness of the LORD." The
whole frame of this world, and every creature
in it, and all the several degrees of being and per-
fection, which are in the creatures, and the provi-
dence of God towards them all, in the preservation
of them, and providing for the happiness of all of
them in such degrees as they are capable of it, are a
plentiful demonstration of the divine goodness ; which
I shall endeavour to illustrate in these four particulars.

1. The universal goodness of God appears, in
giving being to so many creatures.
2. In making them all so very good ; considering
the variety, and order, and end of them.
3. In his continual preservation of them.
4. In providing so abundantly for the welfare and
happiness

happiness of all of them, so far as they are capable
and sensible of it. SERM.
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I. The extent of God's goodness appears, in giving being to so many creatures. And this is a pure effect of goodness, to impart and communicate being to any thing. Had not God been good, but of an envious, and narrow, and contracted nature, he would have confined all being to himself, and been unwilling that any thing besides himself should have been; but his goodness prompted him to spread and diffuse himself, and set his power and wisdom on work, to give being to all that variety of creatures which we see and know to be in the world, and, probably, to infinite more than we have the knowledge of. Now it is not imaginable that God could have any other motive to do this, but purely the goodness of his nature. All the motives imaginable besides this, must either be indigency and want, or constraint and necessity; but neither of these can have any place in God; and therefore it was mere goodness that moved him to give being to other things: and therefore all creatures have reason, with the four and twenty elders in the revelations, "to cast their crowns before the throne of God, saying, Thou art worthy, O LORD, to receive glory, and honour, and power; for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure (that is, of mere goodness) they are, and were created."

(I.) Indigency and want can have no place in God; because he that hath all possible perfection, hath all plenty in himself; from whence results all-sufficiency and complete happiness. So that the divine nature need not look out of itself for happiness, being incapable of any addition to the happiness and perfection it is already possessed of, *ipsa suis pollens opibus,*

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opibus, nihil indiga nostri. We make things for our use, houses to shelter us, and clothes to keep us warm; and we propagate our kind, to perpetuate our selves in our posterity: but all this supposeth imperfection, and want, and mortality; to none of which the divine nature is liable and obnoxious.

Nay, it was not want of glory which made God to make the world. It is true, indeed, the glory of God's goodness doth herein appear; and creatures endowed with understanding have reason to take notice of it with thankfulness, praise, and admiration: but there is no happiness redounds to God from it, nor does he feed himself with any imaginary content and satisfaction, such as vain-glorious persons have, from the fluttering applause of their creatures and beneficiaries. God is really "above all blessing and praise." It is great condescension and goodness in him, to accept of our acknowledgments of his benefits, of our imperfect praises, and ignorant admiration of him; and were he not as wonderfully good, as he is great and glorious, he would not suffer us to füll his great and glorious name, by taking it into our mouths; and were it not for our advantage and happiness to own and acknowledge his benefits, for any real happiness and glory that come to him by it, he could well enough be without it, and dispense with us for ever entertaining one thought of him; and were it not for his goodness, might despise the praises of his creatures, with infinitely more reason than wise men do the applause of fools. There is, indeed, one text of scripture which seems to intimate that God made all creatures for himself, as he had some need of them, Prov. xvi. 4. "The

" LORD hath made all things for himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." Now if by God

making

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making all things for himself, be meant, that he aimed at and intended the manifestation of his wisdom, and power, and goodness in the creation of the world, it is most true that, in this sense, he made all things for himself: but if we understand it so, as if the goodness of his nature did not move him thereunto, but he had some design to serve ends and necessities of his own upon his creatures, this is far from him. But it is very probable, that neither of these are the meaning of this text, which may be rendered, with much better sense, and nearer to the Hebrew, thus, "God hath ordained every thing to that which is fit for it, and the wicked hath he ordained for the day of evil;" that is, the wisdom of God hath fitted one thing to another, punishment to sin, the evil day to the evil doers.

(2.) Nor can necessity and constraint have any place in God. When there was no creature yet made, nothing in being but God himself, there could be nothing to compel him to make any thing, and to extort from him the effects of his bounty: neither are the creatures necessary effects and emanations from the being of God, flowing from the divine essence, as water doth from a spring, and as light streams from the sun: if so, this, indeed, would have been an argument of the fulness of the divine nature, but not of the bounty and goodness of it; and it would have been matter of joy to us that we are, but not a true ground of thankfulness from us to God; as we rejoice and are glad that the sun shines, but we do not give it any thanks for shining, because it shines without any intention or design to do us good; it doth not know that we are the better for it's light, nor did intend we should be, and therefore we have no reason to acknowledge it's goodness to us.

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But God, who is a spirit endowed with knowledge and understanding, does not act as natural and material causes do, which act necessarily and ignorantly; whereas he acts knowingly and voluntarily, with particular intention and design, knowing that he does good, and intending to do so freely, and out of choice, and when he hath no other constraint upon him but this, that his goodness enclines his will to communicate himself to do good: so that the divine nature is under no necessity, but such as is consistent with the most perfect liberty, and freest choice.

Not but that goodness is essential to God, and a necessary perfection of his nature, and he cannot possibly be otherwise than good: but when he communicates his goodness, he knows what he does, and wills and chuseth to do so.

And this kind of necessity is so far from being any impeachment of the divine goodness, that it is the great perfection and praise of it. The Stoick philosophers mistaking this, do blasphemously advance their wise and virtuous man above God himself; for they reason thus; "A wise man is good out of choice, when he may be otherwise; but God, out of necessity of nature, and when he cannot possibly be otherwise than good." But if they had considered things aright, they might have known that this is an imperfection in their wise man, that he can be otherwise than good; for a power to be evil is impotency and weakness. The highest character that ever was given of a man, is that which Velleius Paterculus gives of Cato, that he was *vir bonus, quia aliter esse non potuit*, "a good man, because he could not be otherwise:" this applied to a mortal man, is a very extravagant and undue commendation; but it signifies thus much, that it is the highest perfection,

not

not to be able to be otherwise than good ; and this is the perfection of the divine nature, that goodness is essential to it : but the expressions and communications of his goodness are spontaneous and free, designed and directed by infinite knowledge and wisdom.

This is the first: the second particular is, that God hath made all creatures very good, considering the variety, and order, and end of them. But this I shall reserve to another opportunity.

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The goodness of God.

P S A L. cxlv. 9.

The LORD is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

I N the handling of this argument, I proposed to do these four things: S E R M.
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First, to consider what is the proper notion of goodness, as it is attributed to GOD.

Secondly, to shew that this perfection belongs to GOD.

Thirdly, to consider the effects of the divine goodness, together with the large extent of it, in respect of it's objects, And,

Fourthly, to answer some objections which may seem to contradict, and bring in question the goodness of GOD.

I have considered the two first ; and in speaking

to the third, I proposed the considering these two things :

I. The universal extent of God's goodness to all his creatures.

II. More especially the goodness of God to man, which we are more especially concerned to take notice of, and be affected with.

The first of these appears in these four particulars.

1. In his giving being to so many creatures.

2. In making them all so very good, considering the number and variety, the rank and order, the end and design of all of them.

3. In his continual preservation of them.

4. In his providing so abundantly for the welfare and happiness of all of them, so far as they are capable and sensible of it.

The first of these I spoke largely to ; I proceed to shew in the

2d place, That the universal goodness of God appears, in making all these creatures so very good, considering the number and variety, the rank and order, the end and design of all of them. His goodness excited and set a-work his power to make this world, and all the creatures in it ; and that they might be made in the best manner that could be, his wisdom directed his power, " he hath made all things " in number, weight, and measure ;" so that they are admirably fitted and proportioned to one another : and that there is an excellent contrivance in all sorts of beings, and a wonderful beauty and harmony in the whole frame of things, is, I think, sufficiently visible to every discerning and unprejudiced mind. The lowest form of creatures, I mean those which are destitute of sense, do all of them contribute, some way or other, to the use, and conveniency, and

comfort

comfort of the creatures above them, which being endowed with sense, are capable of enjoying the benefit and delight of them, which being so palpable in the greatest part of them, may reasonably be presumed, though it be not so discernable concerning all the rest; so that when we survey the whole creation of GOD, and the several parts, we may well cry out with David, Psal. civ. 24. "O LORD, how manifold are thy works? in wisdom hast thou made them all."

It is true, indeed, there are degrees of perfection in the creatures, and GOD is not equally good to all of them. Those creatures which are of more noble and excellent natures, and to which he hath communicated more degrees of perfection, they partake more of his goodness, and are more glorious instances of it: but every creature partakes of the divine goodness in a certain degree, and according to the nature and capacity of it. GOD, if he pleased, could have made nothing but immortal spirits; and he could have made as many of these as there are individual creatures of all sorts in the world: but it seemed good to the wise architect, to make several ranks and orders of beings, and to display his power, and goodness, and wisdom, in all imaginable variety of creatures; all which should be good in their kind, though far short of the perfection of angels and immortal spirits.

He that will build an house for all the uses and purposes of which an house is capable, cannot make it all foundation, and great beams and pillars; must not so contrive it, as to make it all rooms of state and entertainment: but there must of necessity be in it meaner materials, rooms and offices for several uses and purposes, which, however inferior to the rest in dignity and degree, do yet contribute to the beauty

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ty and advantage of the whole: so in this great frame of the world, it was fit there should be variety, and different degrees of perfection in the several parts of it; and this is so far from being an impeachment of the wisdom or goodness of him that made it, that it is an evidence of both: for the meanest of all God's creatures is good, considering the nature and rank of it, and the end to which it was designed; and we cannot imagine how it could have been ordered and framed better, though we can easily tell how it might have been worse, and that if this or that had been wanting, or had been otherwise, it had not been so good; and those who have been most conversant in the contemplation of nature, and of the works of God, have been most ready to make this acknowledgment.

But then if we consider the creatures of God, with relation to one another, and with regard to the whole frame of things, they will all appear to be very good; and notwithstanding this or that kind of creatures be much less perfect than another, and there be a very great distance between the perfection of a worm, and of an angel; yet considering every thing in the rank and order which it hath in the creation, it is as good as could be, considering it's nature and use, and the place allotted to it among the creatures.

And this difference in the works of God, between the goodness of the several parts of the creation, and the excellent and perfect goodness of the whole, the scripture is very careful to express to us in the history of the creation, where you find God represented, as first looking upon, and considering every day's work by itself, and approving it, and pronouncing it to be good, Gen. i, 4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25. at the end of every day's work, it is said, that "God

" saw

“ saw the light, that it was good :” but then, when all was finished, and he surveyed the whole together, it is said, ver. 31. that “ God saw every thing that he had made, and behold, it was very good :” very good, that is, the best ; the Hebrews having no other superlative. Every creature of God by itself is good : but take the whole together, and they are very good, the best that could be.

3. The universal goodness of God farther appears, in the careful and continual preservation of the things which he hath made ; his upholding and maintaining the several creatures in being, in their natural state and order ; those which have life, in life, to the period which he hath determined and appointed for them ; in his preserving the whole world, his managing and governing this vast frame of things, in such sort, as to keep it from running into confusion and disorder. This is a clear demonstration, no less of the goodness than of the wisdom and power of God, that for so many ages all the parts of it have kept their places, and perform the offices and work for which nature designed them ; that the world is not, in the course of so many thousand years, grown old and weak, and out of repair, and that the frame of things doth not dissolve and fall in pieces.

And the goodness of God doth not only take care of the main, and support the whole frame of things ; and preserve the more noble and considerable creatures, but even the least and meanest of them. The providence of God doth not overlook any thing that he hath made, nor despise any of the works of his hands, so as to let them relapse, and fall back into nothing, through neglect and inadvertency ; as many as there are, he takes care of them all, Psal. civ. 27, 28. where the psalmist, speaking of the innume-
rable

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able multitude of creatures upon the earth, and in the sea, "these (saith he) wait all upon thee, that thou mayest give them their meat in due season; that thou givest them, they gather; thou openest thine hand, and they are filled with good." And to the same purpose, Psal. cxlv. 15, 16. "The eyes of all wait upon thee, and thou givest them their meat in due season; thou openest thine hand, and satisfiest the desire of every living thing." The inanimate creatures, which are without sense; and the brute creatures, which though they have sense, are without understanding, and so can have no end and design of self-preservation, God preserves them, no less than men who are endowed with reason and foresight to provide for themselves; Psal. xxxvi. 6. "Thou preservest man and beast." And Psal. cxlvii. 9. "He giveth to the beast his food, and to the young ravens which cry." And so our SAVIOUR declares to us the particular providence of God towards those creatures, Matt. vi. 26. "Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feedeth them." Ver. 28, 29. "Consider the lilies of the field how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: and yet I say unto you, that even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these."

And though all the creatures below man, being without understanding, can take no notice of this bounty of God to them, nor make any acknowledgments to him for it; yet man, who is the priest of the visible creation, and placed here in this great temple of the world, to offer up sacrifices of praise and thanksgiving to God, for his universal goodness to all his creatures, ought to bless God in their behalf,

half, and to sing praises to him, in the name of all the inferior creatures, which are subjected to his dominion and use; because they are all, as it were, his family, his servants and utensils; and if God should neglect any of them, and suffer them to perish and miscarry, it is we that should find the inconvenience and want of them; and therefore we should on their behalf celebrate the praises of God; as we find David often does in the Psalms, calling upon the inanimate and the brute creatures to praise the LORD.

4. The universal goodness of God doth yet farther appear, in providing so abundantly for the welfare and happiness of all his creatures, so far as they are capable and sensible of it. He doth not only support and preserve his creatures in being, but takes care that they should all enjoy that happiness and pleasure which their natures are capable of. The creatures endowed with sense and reason, which only are capable of pleasure and happiness, God hath taken care to satisfy the several appetites and inclinations which he hath planted in them; and according as nature hath enlarged their desires and capacities, so he enlargeth his bounty towards them; "he openeth his hand, and satisfieth the desire of every living thing." God doth not immediately bring meat to the creatures when they are hungry; but it is near to them, commonly in the elements wherein they are bred, or within their reach, and he hath planted inclinations in them to hunt after it, and to lead and direct them to it, and to encourage self-preservation, and to oblige and instigate them to it; and that they might not be melancholy and weary of life, he hath so ordered the nature of living creatures, that hunger and thirst are most implacable desires, exceeding painful, and even intolerable;

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and likewise that the satisfaction of these appetites should be a mighty pleasure to them. And for those creatures that are young, and not able to provide for themselves, God hath planted in all creatures a *σὸς*, a natural affection towards their young ones, which will effectually put them upon seeking provisions for them, and cherishing them, with that care and tenderness which their weak and helpless condition doth require: and reason is not more powerful and effectual in mankind to this purpose, than this natural instinct is in brute creatures; which shews what care God hath taken, and what provision he hath made in the natural frame of all his creatures, for the satisfaction of the inclinations and appetites which he hath planted in them; the satisfaction whereof is their pleasure and happiness. And thus I have done with the first head I proposed, the universal extent of God's goodness to his creatures: let us now proceed, in the

II^d place, to consider more particularly the goodness of God to men; which we are more especially concerned to take notice of, and to be affected with it. And we need go no farther than our own observation and experience, to prove the goodness of God; every day of our lives "we see and taste that "the LORD is good;" all that we are, and all the good that we enjoy, and all that we expect and hope for, is from the divine goodness: "every good and "perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from "the father of lights," Jam. i. 17. And the best and most perfect of his gifts he bestows on the sons of men. What is said of the wisdom of God, Prov. viii. may be applied to his goodness; the goodness of God shines forth in all the works of the creation, in the heavens and clouds above, and in the fountains of the great deep,

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deep, in the earth and the fields, but "its delight is with the sons of men." Such is the goodness of God to man, that it is represented to us in scripture under the notion of love: God is good to all his creatures, but he is only said to "love the sons of men." More particularly the goodness of God to man appears,

1. That he hath given us such noble and excellent beings, and placed us in so high a rank and order of his creatures. We owe to him that we are, and what we are; we do not only partake of that effect of his goodness which is common to us with all other creatures, that we have received our being from him; but we are peculiarly obliged to him for his more especial goodness, that he hath made us reasonable creatures, of that kind which we should have chosen to have been of, if we could suppose that, before we were, it had been referred to us, and put to our choice, what part we would be of this visible world. But we did not contrive and chuse this condition for our selves, we are no ways accessary to the dignity and excellency of our beings: but God chose this condition for us, and made us what we are; so that we may say with David, Psal. c. 3, 4, 5. "It is he that hath made us, and not we our selves. O enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise; be thankful unto him, and speak good of his name: for the LORD is good." The goodness of God is the spring and fountain of our beings; but for that, we had been nothing; and but for his farther goodness, we might have been any thing, of the lowest and meanest rank of his creatures. But the goodness of God hath been pleased to advance us to be the top and perfection of the visible creation; he hath been pleased to endow

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us with mind and understanding, and made us capable of happiness, in the knowledge, and love, and enjoyment of himself. He hath curiously and wonderfully wrought the frame of our bodies, so as to make them fit habitations for reasonable souls, and immortal spirits; he hath made our very bodies vessels of honour, when of the very same clay he hath made innumerable other creatures of a much lower rank and condition: so that though man, in respect of his body, be akin to the earth, yet, in regard of his soul, he is allied to heaven, of a divine original, and descended from above. Of all the creatures in this visible world, man is the chief; and what is said of behemoth, or the elephant, Job xlii. in respect of his great strength, and the vast bigness of his body, is only true absolutely of man, that he is, *divini opificii caput*; “the chief of the ways of God, and “upon earth there is none like him.”

The Psalmist takes particular notice of the goodness of God to man, in this respect of the excellency and dignity of his being; Psal. viii. 5. “Thou “hast made him little lower than the angels, and “hast crowned him with glory and honour.” And this advantage of our nature above other creatures, we ought thankfully to acknowledge; though most men are so stupid as to overlook it; as Elihu complains, Job xxxv. 10, 11. “None saith, where is “God my maker, who teacheth us more than the “beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the “fowls of heaven?”

2. The goodness of God to man appears, in that he hath made and ordained so many things chiefly for our use. The beauty and usefulness of the creatures below us, their plain subserviency to our necessity, and benefit, and delight, are so many clear eviden-

ces of the divine goodness to us, not only discernable to our reason, but even palpable to our senses, so that we may “ see and taste that the LORD is gracious.”

This David particularly insists upon as a special ground of praise and thanksgiving to God, that he hath subjected so great a part of the creation to our dominion and use; Psal. viii. 6, 7, 8. speaking of man, “ thou hast made him to have dominion over
“ the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things
“ under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea, and the
“ beasts of the field: the fowl of the air, and the
“ fish of the sea, and whatsoever passeth through the
“ paths of the seas.” What an innumerable variety of creatures are there in this inferior world, which were either solely or principally made for the use and service, pleasure and delight of man! How many things are there, which serve for the necessity and support, for the contentment and comfort of our lives! How many things for the refreshment and delight of our senses, and the exercise and employment of our understandings! That God hath not made man for the service of other creatures, but other creatures for the service of man, Epictetus doth very ingeniously argue from this observation; that the creatures below man, the brute beasts, have all things in a readiness, nature having provided for them meat, and drink, and lodging; so that they have no absolute need that any should build houses, or make clothes, or store up provision, or prepare and dress meat for them: for, says he, “ being made for the
“ service of another, they ought to be furnished
“ with these things, that they may be always in a
“ readiness to serve their lord and master; a plain
“ evidence that they were made to serve man, and
“ not man to serve them.”

And

The goodness of God.

And to raise our thoughts of God's goodness to us the sons of men yet higher, as he hath given us the creatures below us for our use and convenience; so hath he appointed the creatures above us for our guard and protection, not to say for our service: Psal. xxxiv. 7. "The angel of the LORD encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them;" and then it follows, "O taste and see that the LORD is good!" and Psal. xci. 11, 12. "He shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways: they shall bear thee up in their hands." Nay, the apostle speaks as if their whole business and employment were to attend upon, and be serviceable to, good men; Heb. i. 14. "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?"

3. The goodness of God to men appears, in his tender love, and peculiar care of us above the rest of the creatures, being ready to impart and dispense to us the good that is suitable to our capacity and condition, and concerned to exempt us from those manifold evils of want and pain, to which we are obnoxious: I do not mean an absolute exemption from all sorts and degrees of evil, and a perpetual treasure of temporal happiness, and enjoyment of all good things; this is not suitable to our present state, and the rank and order which we are in among the creatures; nor would it be best for us, all things considered. But the goodness of God to us above other creatures, is proportionable to the dignity and excellency of our natures above them; for, as the apostle reasons in another case, "doth God take care for oxen," and shall he not much more extend his care to man? To this purpose our SAVIOUR reasons; Mat. vi. 26. "Behold the fowls of the air:

" for

“ for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns ; yet your heavenly father feedeth them ; are ye not much better than they ? ” And ver. 30. “ Wherefore if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you ? ” and chap. x. 29, 30, 31. “ Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing ? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbred. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows. ” It is true, God hath a special care of his people and servants, above the rest of mankind ; but our SAVIOUR useth these arguments to his disciples, to convince them of the providence of God towards them, as men, and of a more excellent nature than other creatures.

And indeed we are born into the world more destitute and helpless than other creatures ; as if it were on purpose to shew, that God had reserved us for his more peculiar care and providence ; which is so great, that the scripture, by way of condescension, expresseth it to us by the name of love ; so that what effects of care the greatest and tenderest affection in men is apt to produce towards one another, that, and much more, is the effect of God's goodness to us : and this affection of God is common to all men, (though, of all creatures, we have least deserved it) and is ready to diffuse and shed abroad itself, wherever men are qualified for it by duty and obedience, and do not obstruct and stop the emanations of it, by their sins and provocations.

And though the greatest part of mankind be evil, yet this doth not wholly put a stop to his goodness, though it cause many abatements of it, and hinder
many

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many good things from us: but such is the goodness of God, notwithstanding the evil and undutifulness of men, that he is pleased still to concern himself in the government of the world, and to preserve the societies of men from running into utter confusion and disorder; notwithstanding the violence and irregularities of men's wills and passions, the communities of men subsist upon tolerable terms; and notwithstanding the rage and craft of evil men, poor and unarmed innocence and virtue is usually protected, and, sometimes, rewarded in this world, and domineering and outrageous wickedness is very often remarkably checked and chastised. All which instances of God's providence, as they are greatly for the advantage and comfort of mankind, so are they an effectual declaration of that goodness which governs all things, and of God's kind care of the affairs and concernments of men; so that if we look no farther than this world, we may say with David, "Verily there is a reward for the righteous, verily there is a God that judgeth the earth."

I know this argument hath been perverted to a quite contrary purpose; that if goodness governed the world, and administered the affairs of it, good and evil would not be so carelessly and promiscuously dispensed; good men would not be so great sufferers, nor wicked men so prosperous as many times they are.

But this also, if rightly considered, is an effect of God's goodness, and infinite patience to mankind, that "he causeth his sun to rise, and his rain to fall upon the just and unjust;" that, upon the provocations of men, he does not give over his care of them, and throw all things into confusion and ruin: this plainly shews, that he designs this life for the

trial

trial of men's virtue and obedience, in order to the greater reward of it ; and therefore " he suffers men to walk in their own ways," without any great check and controul, and reserves the main bulk of rewards and punishments for another world : So that all this is so far from being any objection against the goodness of God, that, on the contrary, it is an argument of God's immense goodness, and infinite patience, that the world subsists and continues, and that he permits men to take their course, for the fuller trial of them, and the clearer and more effectual declaration of his justice, in the rewards and punishments of another life.

Fourthly and lastly, the goodness of God to mankind most gloriously appears, in the provision he hath made for our eternal happiness. What the happiness of man should have been, had he continued in innocency, is not particularly revealed to us ; but this is certain, that by wilful transgressions we have forfeited all that happiness which our natures are capable of. In this lapsed and ruinous condition of mankind, the goodness and mercy of God was pleased to employ his wisdom for our recovery, and to restore us not only to a new but a greater capacity of glory and happiness. And in order to this, the Son of God assumes our nature for the recovery and redemption of man ; and the pardon of sin is purchased for us by his blood ; eternal life, and the way to it, are clearly discovered to us. God is pleased to enter into a new and better covenant with us, and to afford us inward grace and assistance, to enable us to perform the conditions of it ; and graciously to accept of our faith and repentance, of our sincere resolutions and endeavours of holiness and obedience,

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for perfect and complete righteousness, for his sake who "fulfilled all righteousness."

This is the great and amazing goodness of God to mankind, that when we were in open rebellion against him, he should entertain thoughts of peace and reconciliation; and when he passed by the fallen angels, he should set his affection and love upon the sinful and miserable sons of men. And "herein is the love of God to men perfected," that as he hath made all creatures, both above us, and below us, subservient and instrumental to our subsistence and preservation; so, for the ransom of our souls from eternal ruin and misery, "he hath not spared his own son, but hath given him up to death for us;" him, whom "he hath commanded all the angels of God to worship," and to whom he hath made subject all creatures in heaven and earth; him, "who made the world," and "who upholds all things by the word of his power, who is the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person."

And after such a stupendous instance as this, what may we not reasonably hope for, and promise ourselves from the divine goodness? So the apostle hath taught us to reason; Rom. viii. 32. "He that spared not his own son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?"

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The goodness of God.

P S A L. cxlv. 9.

The LORD is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

I N handling this argument, I proceeded in this S E R M.
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method:

First, to consider what is the proper notion of goodness.

Secondly, to shew that this perfection of goodness belongs to God.

Thirdly, I considered the effects of the divine goodness, under these heads:

I. The universal extent of it, in the number, variety, order, end, and design of the things created by him, and his preservation, and providing for the welfare and happiness of them.

II. I considered more particularly the goodness of God to mankind, of which I gave these four instances.

1. That he hath given us such noble beings, and placed us in so high a rank and order of his creatures.

2. In that he hath made and ordained so many things chiefly for us.

3. In that he exerciseth so peculiar a providence over us above the rest, that though he is said to be good to all, he is only said to love the sons of men.

4. In that he hath provided for us eternal life and happiness. There only now remains the

Fourth and last particular to be spoken to, which was, to answer some objections which may seem to

contradict and bring in question the goodness of God, and they are many, and have (some of them especially) great difficulty in them, and therefore it will require great consideration and care, to give a clear and satisfactory answer to them, which undoubtedly they are capable of; the goodness of God being one of the most certain and unquestionable truths in the world. I shall mention those which are most considerable and obvious, and do almost of themselves spring up in every man's mind, and they are these four; the first of them more general, the other three more particular.

First, If God be so exceeding good, whence comes it to pass that there is so much evil in the world, of several kinds; evil of imperfection, evil of affliction or suffering, and (which is the greatest of all others, and indeed the cause of them) evil of sin?

Secondly, the doctrine of absolute reprobation; by which is meant, the decreeing of the greatest part of mankind to eternal misery and torment, without any consideration or respect to their sin or fault: this seems notoriously to contradict, not only the notion of infinite goodness, but any competent measure and degree of goodness.

Thirdly, the eternal misery and punishment of men for temporal faults, seems hard to be reconciled with that excess of goodness which we suppose to be in God.

Fourthly, the instances of God's great severity to mankind, upon occasion, in those great calamities which, by the providence of God, hath, in several ages, either befallen mankind in general, or particular nations; and here I shall confine myself to scripture instances, as being the most certain and remarkable, or at least equal to any that are to be met with in history;

history ; as the early and universal degeneracy of mankind, by the sin and transgression of our first parents ; the destruction of the world by a general deluge ; the sudden and terrible destruction of Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them, by fire and brimstone from heaven ; the cruel extirpation of the Canaanites, by the express command of God ; and lastly, the great calamities which befel the Jewish nation, and the final ruin and perdition of them at the destruction of Jerusalem.

These are the objections against the goodness of God, which I shall severally consider, and, with all the brevity and clearness I can, endeavour to return a particular answer to them.

The first objection, which I told you is more general, is this ; if God be so exceeding good, whence then comes it to pass that there is so much evil in the world, of several kinds ? It is evident beyond denial, that evil abounds in the world. “ The whole world lies in evil,” *ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται*, “ lies in the wickedness, (so our translation renders it) is involved in sin ; but by the article and opposition, St. John seems to intend the devil : “ We know, says he, “ that we are of God, and the whole world,” *ἐν τῷ πονηρῷ κεῖται*, “ is subject to the evil one,” and under his power and dominion. Which way soever we render it, it signifies, that evil of one kind or other reigns in the world. Now, can evil come from a good God ? “ Out of the same mouth proceedeth “ blessing and cursing. Doth a fountain send forth “ at the same place sweet water and bitter ? This “ cannot be,” as St. James speaks in another case. But all evils that are in the world, must either be directly procured by the divine providence, or permitted to happen ; and next to the causing and procur-
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ing of evil, it seems to be contrary to the goodness of God, to permit that there should be any such thing, when it is in his power to help and hinder it.

Answer. To give an account of this : it was an ancient doctrine of some of the most ancient nations, that there were two first causes or principles of all things, the one of good things, the other of bad ; which, among the Persians, were called Oromasdes and Arimanius ; among the Egyptians, Osiris and Typhon ; among the Chaldeans, good or bad planets ; among the Greeks *Ζεὺς* and *Ἄδης* : Plutarch expressly says, that the good principle was called God, and the bad, demon, or the devil ; in conformity to which ancient traditions, the Manichees (a sad sect of Christians) set up two principles, the one infinitely good, which they supposed to be the original cause of all good that is in the world ; the other infinitely evil, to which they ascribed all the evils that are in the world.

But besides that the notion of an infinite evil is a contradiction, it would be to no purpose to suppose two opposite principles of equal power and force. That the very notion of an infinite evil is a contradiction, will be very clear, if we consider, that what is infinitely evil, must be infinitely imperfect, and consequently infinitely weak ; and for that reason, though never so mischievous and malicious, yet being infinitely weak, and ignorant, and foolish, would neither be in a capacity to contrive mischief, nor to execute it. But admit that a being infinitely mischievous were infinitely cunning, and infinitely powerful, yet it could do no evil ; because the opposite principle of infinite goodness, being also infinitely wise and powerful, they would tie up one another's hands : so that, upon this supposition, the notion of a deity would

would signify just nothing, and by virtue of the eternal opposition and equality of these two principles, they would keep one another at a perpetual bay, and, being an equal match for one another, instead of being two deities, they would be two idols, able to do neither good nor evil.

But to return a more distinct and satisfactory answer to this objection: there are three sorts of evil in the world; the evil of imperfection; the evil of affliction and suffering; and the evil of sin.

And first, for the evil of imperfection, I mean, natural imperfections; these are not simply and absolutely, but only comparatively evil: now comparative evil is but a less degree of goodness; and it is not at all inconsistent with the goodness of God, that some creatures should be less good than others, that is, imperfect in comparison of them; nay, it is very agreeable both to the goodness and wisdom of God, that there should be this variety in the creatures, and that they should be of several degrees of perfection, being made for several uses and purposes, and to be subservient to one another, provided they all contribute to the harmony and beauty of the whole.

Some imperfection is necessarily involved in the very nature and condition of a creature, as that it derives it's being from another, and necessarily depends upon it, and is beholden to it, and is likewise of necessity finite and limited in it's nature and perfections; and as for those creatures which are less perfect than others, this also, that there should be degrees of perfection, is necessary, upon supposition, that the wisdom of God thinks fit to display itself in variety of creatures of several kinds and ranks. For though, comparing the creatures with one another, the angelical nature is best, and most perfect; yet it
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is absolutely best, that there should be other creatures besides angels. There are many parts of the creation which are rashly and inconsiderately by us concluded to be evil and imperfect, as some noxious and hurtful creatures, which yet in other respects, and to some purposes, may be very useful, and against the harm and mischief whereof we are sufficiently armed, by such means of defence, and such antidotes, as reason and experience are able to find and furnish us withal; and those parts of the world which we think of little or no use, as rocks and deserts, and that vast wilderness of the sea, if we consider things well, are of great use to several very considerable purposes; or if we can discern no other use of them, they serve at least to help our dulness, and to make us more attentively to consider, and to admire the perfection and usefulness of the rest; at the worst, they may serve for foils to set off the wise order and contrivance of other things, and (as one expresseth it very well) they may be like a blackmoor's head in a picture, which gives the greater beauty to the whole piece.

2dly, For the evils of affliction and suffering; and these either befall brute creatures, or men endowed with reason and consideration.

1st, For those which befall the brute creatures; those sufferings which nature inflicts upon them are very few; the greatest they meet withal are from men, or upon their account, for whose sake they were chiefly made, and to whose reasonable use and gentle dominion they are consigned.

It is necessary, from the very nature of these creatures, that they should be passive, and liable to pain; and yet it doth in no wise contradict either the wisdom or goodness of God to make such creatures,
because

because all these pains are, for the most part, fully recompensed by the pleasure these creatures find in life; and that they have such a pleasure and happiness in life, is evident, in that all creatures, notwithstanding the miseries they endure, are still fond of life, and unwilling to part with it: no creature but man (who only hath perverted his nature) ever seeks the destruction of itself; and since all brute creatures are so loth to go out of being, we may probably conclude, that if they could deliberate whether they would be, or not, they would chuse to come into being, even upon these hard conditions.

But however that be, this we are sure of, that they suffer chiefly from us, and upon our account; we, who are their natural lords, having depraved our selves first, are become cruel and tyrannical to them; nay, the scripture tells us, that they suffer for our sakes, and that "the whole creation groaneth, and is in bondage" for the sin of man. And this is not unreasonable, that being made principally for man, they should suffer upon his account, as a part of his goods and estate; not as a punishment to them (which, under the notion of punishment, they are not capable of) but as a punishment to him who is the lord and owner of them, they being by this means become more weak and frail, and less useful and serviceable to him for whom they were made; so that the sufferings of the creatures below us are, in a great measure, to be charged upon us, under whose dominion God hath put them.

2dly, As for the afflictions and sufferings which befall men, these are not natural and of God's making, but the result and fruit of our own doings, the effects and consequences of the ill use of our own liberty, and free choice; and God does not willingly

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send them upon us, but we wilfully pull them down upon ourselves; for "he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men," as the prophet tells us, Lam. iii. 33. Or, as it is in the Wisdom of Solomon, Chap. i. 12, 13. "God made not death, neither hath he pleasure in the destruction of the living; but men pull destruction upon themselves, with the works of their own hands." All the evils that are in the world, are either the effects of our own sin, as poverty, and disgrace, pains, diseases, and death, which are sometimes more immediately inflicted upon men by a visible providence and hand of God, but are usually brought upon us by our selves, in the natural course and order of things; or they are the effects of other men's sins, brought upon us by the ambition and covetousness, by the malice and cruelty of others: and these evils, though they are procured and caused by others, yet they are deserved by ourselves; and though they are immediately from the hand of men, yet we ought to look farther, and consider them as directed and disposed by the providence of God; as David did when Shimei cursed him; "God (saith he) hath bid him curse David," though it immediately proceeded from Shimei's insolence and ill-nature.

Now upon the supposition of sin, the evils of affliction and suffering are good, because they are of great use to us, and serve to very good ends and purposes.

1. As they are the proper punishments of sin. Evil is good to them that do evil; that is, it is fit and proper, just and due: Psal cvii. 17. "Fools, because of their transgression, and because of their iniquities, are afflicted." And it is fit they should be so; crooked to crooked is streight and right. "A rod

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“ for the back of fools, saith Solomon ;” and elsewhere, “ God hath made every thing for that which is fit for it, and the evil day for the wicked man.”

2dly, As they are the preventions and remedies of greater evils. Evils of affliction and suffering are good for wicked men, to bring them to a sense of their sin, and to reclaim them from it, and thereby to prevent greater temporal evils, and preserve them from eternal misery ; and not only good to the person that suffers, but likewise to others, to deter and affright them from the like sins ; to prevent the contagion of sin, and to stop the progress of iniquity, upon which greater guilt and worse mischiefs might ensue ; and they are good to good men, to awaken and rouse them out of their security, to make them know God and themselves better ; they are almost a necessary discipline for the best of men, much more for evil and depraved dispositions ; and we might as reasonably expect that there should be no rod in a school, as that there should be no suffering and afflictions in the world.

3dly, As they are the occasions and matter of many virtues. God teacheth men temperance by want, and patience by reproach and sufferings, charity by persecution, and pity and compassion to others by grievous pains upon our selves. The benefit of afflictions, to them that make a wise use of them, is unspeakable ; they are grievous in themselves, “ nevertheless (saith the apostle to the Hebrews) “ they bring forth the peaceable fruits of “ righteousness, to them that are exercised there “ with.” David gives a great testimony of the mighty benefit and advantage of them, from his own experience ; Psal. cxix. 76. “ Before I was afflicted, “ I went astray, but now have I kept thy word.”

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And ver. 71. "It is good for me that I have been
"afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes."

4thly, The evils of suffering, patiently submitted to, and decently borne, do greatly contribute to the increase of our happiness. All the persecutions and sufferings of good men in this life, "do work for us
"a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." And if they contribute to our greater good and happiness at last, they are good. The glorious reward of the sufferings which we have met with in this life, will in the next clear up the goodness and justice of the divine providence from all those mists and clouds which are now upon it, and fully acquit it from those objections which are now raised against it, upon account of the afflictions and sufferings of good men in this life, which "are not worthy to
"be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in them."

III. As for the evil of sin, which is the great difficulty of all. How is it consistent with the goodness of God, to permit so great an evil as this to come into the world? For answer to this, I desire these two things may be considered :

I. That it doth not at all contradict the wisdom or goodness of God, to make a creature of such a frame, as to be capable of having it's obedience tried, in order to the reward of it ; which could not be, unless such a creature were made mutable, and, by the good or bad use of it's liberty, capable of obeying or disobeying the laws of his creator : for where there is no possibility of sinning, there can be no trial of our virtue and obedience ; and nothing but virtue and obedience are capable of reward. The goodness of God towards us is sufficiently vindicated, in that he made us capable of happiness, and gave us

us sufficient direction and power for the attaining of that end ; and it does in no wise contradict his goodness, that he does not, by his omnipotency, interpose to prevent our sin : for this had been to alter the nature of things, and not to let man be the creature he made him, capable of reward or punishment, according to the good or bad use of his own free choice. It is sufficient that God made man good at first, though mutable, and that he had a power to have continued so, though he wilfully determined himself to evil : this acquits the goodness of God, that “ he made man upright, but he found out” to himself “ many inventions.”

2. If there had not been such an order and rank of creatures as had been in their nature mutable, there had been no place for the manifestation of God’s goodness in a way of mercy and patience : so that though God be not the author of the sins of men, yet, in case of their wilful transgression and disobedience, the goodness of God hath a fair opportunity of discovering itself, in his patience and long-suffering to sinners, and in his merciful care and provision for their recovery out of that miserable state. And this may suffice for answer to the first objection, if God be so good, whence then comes evil?

The second objection against the goodness of God, is from the doctrine of absolute reprobation : by which I mean the decreeing the greatest part of mankind to eternal misery and torment, without any consideration or respect to their sin and fault. This seems not only notoriously to contradict the notion of infinite goodness, but to be utterly inconsistent with the least measure and degree of goodness. Indeed, if by reprobation were only meant, that God, in his own infinite knowledge foresees the sins and wicked-

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wickedness of men, and hath from all eternity determined in himself, what in his word he hath so plainly declared, that he will punish impenitent sinners with everlasting destruction; or if by reprobation be meant, that God hath not elected all mankind, that is, absolutely decreed to bring them infallibly to salvation: neither of these notions of reprobation is any ways inconsistent with the goodness of God; for he may foresee the wickedness of men, and determine to punish it, without any impeachment of his goodness: he may be very good to all, and yet not equally and in the same degree: if God please to bring any infallibly to salvation, this is transcendent goodness; but if he put all others into a capacity of it, and use all necessary and fitting means to make them happy, and, after all this, any fall short of happiness through their own wilful fault and obstinacy; these men are evil and cruel to themselves, but God hath been very good and merciful to them.

But if by reprobation be meant, either that God hath decreed, without respect to the sins of men, their absolute ruin and misery; or that he hath decreed that they shall inevitably sin and perish; it cannot be denied, but that such a reprobation as this doth clearly overthrow all possible notion of goodness. I have told you, that the true and only notion of goodness in God is this, that it is a propension and disposition of the divine nature, to communicate being and happiness to his creatures: but surely nothing can be more plainly contrary to a disposition to make them happy, than an absolute decree, and a peremptory resolution to make them miserable. God is infinitely better than the best of men, and yet none can possibly think that man a good man, who should absolutely resolve to disinheret and destroy his children,

children, without the foresight and consideration of any fault to be committed by them. We may talk of the goodness of God; but it is not an easy matter to devise to say any thing worse than this of the devil.

But it is said, reprobation is an act of sovereignty in God, and therefore not to be measured by the common rules of goodness. But it is contrary to goodness, and plainly inconsistent with it; and we must not attribute such a sovereignty to God, as contradicts his goodness; for if the sovereignty of God may break in at pleasure upon his other attributes, then it signifies nothing to say, that God is good, and wise, and just, if his sovereignty may at any time act contrary to these perfections.

Now if the doctrine of absolute reprobation, and the goodness of God, cannot possibly stand together, the question is, which of them ought to give way to the other? What St. Paul determines in another case, concerning the truth and fidelity of God, will equally hold concerning his goodness: "Let God be good, and every man a liar." The doctrine of absolute reprobation is no part of the doctrine of the holy scriptures, that ever I could find; and there's the rule of our faith. If some great divines have held this doctrine, not in opposition to the goodness of God, but hoping they might be reconciled together, let them do it if they can; but if they cannot, rather let the schools of the greatest divines be called in question, than the goodness of God, which, next to his being, is the greatest and clearest truth in the world.

Thirdly, it is farther objected, that the eternal punishment of men, for temporal faults, seems hard to be reconciled with that excess of goodness, which we suppose to be in God. This

This objection I have fully answered, in a discourse upon St. Matthew, chap. xxv. 46. and therefore shall proceed to the

Fourth and last objection against the goodness of God, from sundry instances of God's severity to mankind, in those great calamities which, by the providence of God, have in several ages either befallen mankind in general, or particular nations.

And here I shall confine my self to scripture instances, as being most known, and most certain and remarkable, or at least equally remarkable with any that are to be met with in any other history; such are the early and universal degeneracy of all mankind, by the sin and transgression of our first parents; the destruction of the world by a general deluge; the sudden and terrible destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them, by fire and brimstone from heaven; the cruel extirpation of the Canaanites by the express command of God; and, lastly, the great calamities which befel the Jewish nation, especially the final ruin and dispersion of them at the destruction of Jerusalem. These, and the like instances of God's severity, seem to call in question his goodness.

Against these severe and dreadful instances of God's severity, it might be a sufficient vindication of his goodness to say in general, that they were all upon great and high provocations; and most of them, after long patience and forbearance, and with a great mixture of mercy, and a declared readiness in God to have prevented or removed them, upon repentance; all which are great instances of the goodness of God: but yet, for the clearer manifestation of the divine goodness, I shall consider them particularly, and as briefly as I can.

1. As for the transgression of our first parents, and the dismal consequences of it to all their posterity :

This is a great depth, and though the scripture mentions it, yet it speaks but little of it; and in matters of mere revelation, we must not attempt “to be wise above what is written.” Thus much is plain, that it was an act of high and wilful disobedience to a very plain and easy command; and that, in the punishment of it, God mitigated the extremity of the sentence (which was present death) by granting our first parents the reprieve of almost a thousand years: and as to the consequences of it to their posterity, God did not, upon this provocation, abandon his care of mankind; and though he removed them out of that happy state and place in which man was created, yet he gave them a tolerable condition and accommodations upon earth: and, which is certainly the most glorious instance of divine goodness that ever was, he was pleased to make the fall and misery of man, the happy occasion of sending his son in our nature, for the recovery and advancement of it to a much happier and better condition than that from which we fell. So the apostle tells us at large, Rom. v. that the grace of God, by JESUS CHRIST, hath redounded much more to our benefit and advantage, than the sin and disobedience of our first parents did to our prejudice.

2. For the general deluge, though it look very severe, yet if we consider it well, we may plainly discern much of goodness in it; it was upon great provocation, by the universal corruption and depravation of mankind: “The earth was filled with violence, and all flesh had corrupted it’s ways; the wickedness of man was great upon the earth, and every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was

“ only evil continually ;” which is not a description of original sin, but of the actual and improved wickedness of mankind : and yet when the wickedness of men was come to this height, God gave them fair warning, before he brought this calamity upon them, “ when the patience of God waited in “ the days of Noah,” for the space of “ an hundred “ and twenty years ;” at last, when nothing would reclaim them; and almost the whole race of mankind were become so very bad, that it is said, “ it repented the LORD that he had made man upon the “ earth, and it grieved him at his heart ;” when things were thus extremely bad, and like to continue so, God, in pity to mankind, and to put a stop to their growing wickedness and guilt, swept them away all at once from the face of the earth, except one family, which he had preserved from this contagion, to be a new seminary of mankind, and, as the heathen poet expresseth it, *mundi melioris origo*, the source and original of a better race.

3. For that terrible destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah by fire and brimstone from heaven, it was not brought upon them till “ the cry of their sin was “ great, and gone up to heaven ;” till by their unnatural lusts they had provoked supernatural vengeance. And it is very remarkable, to what low terms God was pleased to condescend to Abraham for the sparing of them ; if in those five cities there had been found “ but ten righteous persons, he “ would not have destroyed them for those ten’s sake.” So that we may say with the apostle, “ Behold the “ goodness and severity of GOD !” Here was wonderful goodness mixed with this great severity.

4. For the extirpation of the Canaanites, by the express command of God, which hath such an appearance

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pearance of severity, it is to be considered, that this vengeance was not executed upon them, till they were grown ripe for it. God spared them for above four hundred years, for so long their growing impiety is taken notice of, Gen. xviii. 28. where it is said, That "the iniquity of the Amorites was not yet full:" God did not proceed to cut them off, till their case was desperate, past all hopes of recovery, till "the land was defiled with abominations," and surcharged with wickedness, to that degree, as "to spue out it's inhabitants;" as is expressly said, Levit. xviii. 28. When they were arrived to this pitch, it was no mercy to them to spare them any longer, to heap up more guilt and misery to themselves.

Fifthly and lastly, as for the great calamities which God brought upon the Jews, especially in their final ruin and dispersion at the destruction of Jerusalem; not to insist upon the known history of their multiplied rebellions and provocations, of their despiteful usage of God's prophets, whom he sent to warn them of his judgments, and to call them to repentance; of their obstinate refusal to receive correction, and to be brought to amendment, by any means that God could use; for all which provocations, he at last delivered them into their enemies hands, to carry them away captive: not to insist upon this, I shall only consider their final destruction by the Romans, which though it be dreadfully severe, beyond any example of history, yet the provocation was proportionable; for this vengeance did not come upon them, till they had, as it were, extorted it, by the most obstinate impenitency and unbelief, in "rejecting the counsel of God against themselves," and resisting such means as would have brought Tyre and Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah to repentance;

till they had despised the doctrine of life and salvation, delivered to them by the son of God, and confirmed from heaven by the clearest and greatest miracles; and by wicked hands had crucified and slain the son of God, and the SAVIOUR of the world. Nay, even after this greatest of sins that ever was committed, GOD waited for their repentance forty years, to see if in that time they would be brought to a sense of their sins, and “to know the things which be-
“longed to their peace.” And no wonder if, after such provocations, and so much patience, and so obstinate an impenitency, the goodness of GOD at last gave way to his justice, and “wrath came upon
“them to the utmost.”

So that all these instances, rightly considered, are rather commendations of the divine goodness, than just and reasonable objections against it; and notwithstanding the severity of them, it is evident that GOD is good, from the primary inclinations of his nature; and severe only upon necessity, and in case of just provocation. And to be otherwise, not to punish insolent impiety and incorrigible wickedness in a severe and remarkable manner, would not be goodness, but a fond indulgence; not patience, but stupidity; not mercy to mankind, but cruelty: because it would be an encouragement to them to do more mischief, and to bring greater misery upon themselves.

So that if we suppose GOD to be holy and just, as well as good, there is nothing in any of these instances, but what is very consistent with all that goodness which we can suppose to be in a holy, and wise, and just governor, who is a declared enemy to sin, and is resolved to give all fitting discountenance to the breach and violation of his laws. It is necessary,

fary, in kindness and compassion to the rest of mankind, that some should be made remarkable instances of God's severity; that the punishment of a few may be a warning to all, "that they may hear and fear," and, by avoiding the like sins, may prevent the like severity upon themselves.

And now I have, as briefly as I could, explained and vindicated the goodness of God; the consideration whereof is fruitful of many excellent and useful inferences, in relation both to our comfort and our duty: but these I shall refer to another opportunity.

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The goodness of God.

P S A L. cxlv. 9.

The LORD is good to all, and his tender mercies are over all his works.

I Have made several discourses upon this argument, S E R M.
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of the goodness of God; shewing what it is; on what accounts we ascribe it to God; what are the effects and large extent of it to the whole creation, and more particularly to mankind; and, in the last place, considered the several objections which seem to lie against it. I proceed now to the application of this excellent argument, the consideration whereof is so fruitful of useful inferences in relation both to our comfort and duty. And,

I. This shews us the prodigious folly and unreasonableness of atheism. Most of the atheism that is in the world, doth not so much consist in a firm persuasion

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suasion that there is no God, as in vain wishes and desires that there were none. Bad men think it would be a happiness to them, and that they should be in a much better condition, if there were no God, than if there be one. *Nemo Deum non esse credit, nisi cui Deum non esse expedit*, "no man is apt to disbelieve a God, but he whose interest it is that there should be none." And if we could see into the hearts of wicked men we should find this lying at the bottom, that if there be a God, he is just and will punish sin; that he is infinite in power, and not to be resisted, and therefore kills them with his terror so often as they think of him: hence they apprehend it their interest that there should be no God, and wish there were none, and thence are apt to cherish in their minds a vain hope that there is none, and at last endeavour to impose upon themselves by vain reasonings, and to suppress the belief of a God, and to stifle their natural apprehensions and fears of him. So that it is not *primus in orbe deos fecit timor*, "fear that first made gods;" but the fear which bad men have of divine power and justice, that first tempted them to the disbelief of him.

But were not these men as foolish as they are wicked, they would wish with all their hearts there were a God, and be glad to believe so: and the psalmist gives them their true character, who can entertain any such thoughts or wishes; Psal. xiv. 1. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God:" for they are fools who do not understand nor consult their true interest: and if this be true which I have said concerning the goodness of God; if this be his nature, to desire and procure the happiness of his creatures; whoever understands the true nature of God and his own true interest, cannot but wish there were

a God, and be glad of any argument to prove it, and rejoice to find it true; as children are glad of a kind and tender father, and as subjects rejoice in a wise and good prince.

The goodness of God gives us a lovely character of him, makes him so good a father, so gracious a governor of men, that if there were no such being in the world, it were infinitely desirable to mankind that there should be: he is such an one, *qualem omnes cuperent, si deesset*, "as if he were wanting, all men ought to wish for." The being of God is so comfortable, so convenient, so necessary to the felicity of mankind, that (as Tully admirably says) *Dii immortales ad usum hominum fabricati penè videantur*, "if God were not a necessary being of himself, he might almost seem to be made on purpose for the use and benefit of men:" so that atheism is not only an instance of the most horrible impiety, but of the greatest stupidity; and for men to glory in their disbelief of a God, is like the rejoicing and triumph of a furious and befotted multitude, in the murder of a wise and good prince, the greatest calamity and confusion that could possibly have befallen them.

If the evidence of God's being were not so clear as it is, yet the consideration of his goodness ought to check all inclination to atheism and infidelity; for if he be as good as he is represented to us; both by natural light and divine revelation, (and he is so, as sure as he is) if he tender our welfare, and desire our happiness, as much as we ourselves can do, and use all wise ways and proper means to bring it about, then it is plainly every man's interest, even thine, O sinner! to whom, after all thy provocations, he is willing to be reconciled, that there should be such a being

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being as God is ; and whenever thou comest to thy self, thou wilt be sensible of thy want of him, and thy “ soul will thirst for God, even the living God, “ and pant after him as the hart pants after the water brooks ; ” in the day of thy affliction and calamity, “ when distress and anguish cometh upon “ thee,” thou wilt flee to God for refuge, and shelter thy self under his protection, and wouldest not, for all the world, but there were such a being in it to help and deliver thee. *Deos nemo sanus timet* (says Seneca) *furor est metuere salutaria* ; “ no man “ in his wits is afraid there is a God : it is a madness to fear that which is so much for our benefit “ and advantage.” Human nature is conscious to itself of it’s own weakness and insufficiency, and of it’s necessary dependance upon something without itself for it’s happiness, and therefore, in great extremity and distress, the atheist himself hath naturally recourse to him ; and he who denied and rejected him in his prosperity, clings to him in adversity, as his “ only support and present help in time of trouble.” And this is a sure indication, that these men, after all their endeavours to impose upon themselves, have not been able wholly to extinguish in their minds the belief of God, and his goodness ; nay, it is a sign, that at the bottom of their hearts they have a firm persuasion of his goodness, when, after all their insolent defiance of him, they have the confidence to apply themselves to him for mercy and help, in time of need ; and therefore our hearts ought to rise with indignation against those who go about to persuade the belief of a thing so prejudicial to our interest, to take away “ the light of our eyes, “ and the breath of our nostrils,” and to rob us of all the comfort and support, which the belief of an in-

infinite power, conducted by infinite wisdom and goodness, is apt to afford to mankind.

II. We should take great care of perverting and abusing this great goodness by vain confidence and presumption. This is a provocation of an high nature, which the scripture calls, "turning the grace of God into wantonness;" making that an encouragement to sin, which is one of the strongest arguments in the world against it. God is infinitely good and merciful: but we must not therefore think, that he is fond and indulgent to our faults; but, on the contrary, because he is good, he cannot but hate evil. So the scripture every where tells us, that "he is of purer eyes than to behold iniquity; that the face of the LORD is against them that do evil: he is not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with him: the foolish shall not stand in his sight; he hateth all the workers of iniquity." He is ready to shew mercy to those who are qualified for it by repentance, and resolution of a better course: but as long as we continue impenitent, God is implacable, and will deal with us according to the tenor of his laws, and the desert of our doings. Despair is a great sin, but presumption is a greater; despair doubts of the goodness of God, but presumption abuseth it; despair disbelieves, but presumption perverts the best thing in the world to a quite contrary purpose from what it was intended.

III. The consideration of God's goodness is a mighty comfort and relief to our minds, under all our fears and troubles. Great are the fears and jealousies of many devout minds concerning God's love to them, and their everlasting condition; which are commonly founded in one of these two causes, a melancholy temper or mistaken notions and apprehensi-

ons of God; and very often these two meet together, and hinder the cure and removal of one another.

Melancholy, as it is an effect of bodily temper, is a disease not to be cured by reason and argument, but by physick and time: but the mistakes which men have entertained concerning God, if they be not set on and heightened by melancholy, (as many times they are) may be rectified by a true representation of the goodness of God, confirmed by reason and scripture. Many good men have had very hard and injurious thoughts of God instilled into them, from doctrines too commonly taught and received; as if he did not sincerely desire the happiness of his creatures, but had from all eternity decreed to make the greatest part of mankind, with a secret purpose and design to make them miserable, and, consequently, were not serious and in good earnest in his invitations and exhortations of sinners to repentance; and it is no wonder if such jealousies as these concerning God, make men doubtful whether God love them, and very scrupulous and anxious about their everlasting condition.

I have already told you that these harsh doctrines have no manner of foundation, either in reason or scripture; that God earnestly desires our happiness, and affords us sufficient means to that end; that he bears a more hearty good-will to us, than any man does to his friend, or any father upon earth ever did to his dearest child; in comparison of which, the greatest affection of men to those whom they love best, is “but as the drop of the bucket, as the very small dust upon the balance.” If we have right apprehensions of God’s goodness, we can have no temptation to despair of his kind and merciful intentions to us, provided we be but careful of our duty to him, and do

do sincerely repent and forsake our sins. Plainer declarations no words can make, than those we meet with in the holy scriptures, that "God hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that he should turn from his wickedness and live;" that "he would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth;" that "he is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance;" that "he that confesseth and forsaketh his sin, shall have mercy;" that "if the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and return unto the LORD, he will have mercy, and will abundantly pardon."

As for outward calamities and afflictions, the consideration of God's goodness is a firm ground of consolation to us, giving us assurance, that God will either prevent them by his providence, or support us under them, or rescue us out of them, or turn them to our greater good and happiness in this world or the next. St. Paul speaks of it as the firm belief and persuasion of all good men, that, in the issue, all afflictions should prove to their advantage. "We know (says he) that all things shall work together for good to them that love God." And one of the greatest evidences of our love to God, is a firm belief and persuasion of his goodness: if we believe his goodness, we cannot but love him; and if we love him, "all things shall work together for our good."

And this is a great cordial to those who are under grievous persecutions and sufferings, which is the case of our brethren in a neighbouring nation, and may come to be ours, God knows how soon. But though the malice of men be great, and backed with a power not to be controlled by any visible means,

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and therefore likely to continue; yet the goodness of God is greater than the malice of men, and of a longer duration and continuance. And thus David comforted himself, when he was persecuted by Saul, Psal. lii. 1. "Why boasteth thou thy self in mischief, O mighty man? the goodness of God endureth continually." The persecution which Saul raised against him was very powerful, and lasted a long time; but he comforts himself with this, that "the goodness of God endures for ever."

IV. The consideration of God's goodness, is a powerful motive and argument to several duties.

1. To the love of God. And this is the most proper and natural effect and operation of the goodness of God upon our minds. Several of the divine attributes are very awful, but goodness is amiable; and without this nothing else is so. Power and wisdom may command dread and admiration; but nothing but goodness can challenge our love and affection. Goodness is amiable for itself, though no benefit and advantage should from thence redound to us; but when we find the comfortable effects of it, when the riches of God's goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance, are laid out upon us, when we live upon that goodness, and are indebted to it for all that we have and hope for; this is a much greater endearment to us of that excellency and perfection, which was amiable for itself. We cannot but love him who is good, and does us good; whose goodness extends to all his creatures, but is exercised in so peculiar a manner towards the sons of men, that it is called love; and if God vouchsafe to love us, well may this be the "first and great commandment, Thou shalt love the lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind."

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2. The consideration of God's goodness is likewise an argument to us to fear him; not as a slave does his master, but as a child does his father, who the more he loves him, the more afraid is he to offend him. "There is forgiveness with thee (saith the psalmist) that thou mayest be feared:" because God is ready to forgive, we should be afraid to offend. "Men shall fear the LORD and his goodness:" (saith the prophet) Hosea iii. 5. And, indeed, nothing is more to be dreaded, than despised goodness, and abused patience, which turns into fury and vengeance: "despisekest thou the riches of his goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance, (says the apostle) and treasurest up to thy self wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God?"

3. The consideration of God's goodness, is a powerful motive to obedience to his laws, and (as the apostle expresseth it) "to walk worthy of the LORD unto all well pleasing, being fruitful in every good work." This argument Samuel useth to the people of Israel, to persuade them to obedience, 1 Sam. xii. 24. "only fear the LORD, and serve him in truth, with all your heart; for consider how great things he hath done for you."

And, indeed, the laws, which God hath given us, are none of the least instances of his goodness to us, since they all tend to our good, and are proper causes and means of our happiness: so that in challenging our obedience to his laws, as acknowledgments of our obligation to him for his benefits, he lays a new obligation, and confers a greater benefit upon us. All that his laws require of us, is to do that which is best for our selves, and does most directly conduce to our own welfare and happiness.

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Considering our infinite obligations to God, he might have challenged our obedience to the severest and harshest laws he could have imposed upon us; so that as the servants said to Naaman, "Had the prophet bid thee do some great thing, would'st thou not have done it? how much more when he hath only said, wash and be clean?" If God had required of us things very grievous and burthensom; in love and gratitude to him, we ought to have yielded a ready and chearful obedience to such commands: how much more when he hath only said, do this, and be happy? In testimony of your love to me, do these things which are the greatest kindness and benefit to your selves.

4. "The goodness of God" should "lead men to repentance." One of the greatest aggravations of our sins is, that we offend against so much goodness, and make so bad a requital for it; "Do ye thus requite the LORD, O foolish people, and unwise!" The proper tendency of God's goodness and patience to sinners, is to bring them to a sense of their miscarriage, and to a resolution of a better course. When we reflect upon the blessings and favours of God, and his continual goodness to us, can we chuse but be ashamed of our terrible ingratitude and disobedience? Nothing is more apt to make an ingenuous nature to relent, than the sense of undeserved kindness; that God should be so good to us, who are evil and unthankful to him; that though we be enemies to him, yet "when we hunger, he feeds us; when we thirst, he gives us to drink;" heaping, as it were, "coals of fire on our heads," on purpose to melt us into repentance, and to overcome our evil by his goodness.

5. The consideration of God's goodness, is a firm ground

ground of trust and confidence. What may we not hope and assuredly expect from immense and boundless goodness? If we have right apprehensions of the goodness of God, we cannot possibly distrust him, or doubt of the performance of those gracious promises which he hath made to us; the same goodness which inclined him to make such promises, will effectually ingage him to make them good. If God be so good as he hath declared himself, why should we think that he will not help us in our need, and relieve us in our distress, and comfort us in our afflictions and sorrows? If we may with confidence rely upon any thing to confer good upon us, and to preserve and deliver us from evil, we may trust infinite goodness.

6. The goodness of God is, likewise, an argument to us to patience and contentedness with every condition. If the hand of God be severe and heavy upon us in any affliction, we may be assured that it is not without great cause that so much goodness is so highly offended and displeased with us; that he designs our good in all the evils he sends to us, and does not chasten us for his pleasure but for our profit; that we are the cause of our own sufferings, and our sins separate between God and us, and withhold good things from us; that, in the final issue and result of things, "all things shall work together for good" to us; and therefore we ought not to be discontented at any thing which will certainly end in our happiness.

7. Let us imitate the goodness of God. The highest perfection of the best and most perfect being is worthy to be our pattern: This the scripture frequently proposeth to us; Math. v. 48. "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is
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“ in heaven is perfect.” How is that? in being good, and kind, and merciful, as God is. “ But I say unto you (says our LORD) love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil, and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just, and on the unjust.” And then it follows, “ Be ye therefore perfect, even as your father which is in heaven is perfect.” The same pattern St. Paul proposeth to us, Eph. iv. 32. and ch. v. 1. “ Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted; forgiving one another, even as God for CHRIST’s sake hath forgiven you. Be ye therefore followers of God as dear children, and walk in love.” We cannot in any thing resemble God more, than in goodness, and kindness, and mercy, and in a readiness to forgive those who have been injurious to us, and to be reconciled to them.

Let us then often contemplate this perfection of God, and represent it to our minds, that, by the frequent contemplation of it, we may “ be transformed into the image of the divine goodness.” Is God so good to his creatures? with how much greater reason should we be so to our fellow-creatures? Is God good to us? let us imitate his universal goodness, by endeavouring the good of mankind; and, as much as in us lies, of the whole creation of God. What God is to us, and what we would have him still be to us, that let us be to others. We are infinitely beholden to this perfection of God for all that we are, and for all that we enjoy, and for all that we expect; and therefore we have all the reason in the world to admire and imitate it. Let this pattern

tern of the divine goodness be continually before us, that we may be still fashioning our selves in the temper of our minds, and in the actions of our lives, to a likeness and conformity to it.

Lastly, the consideration of the divine goodness should excite our praise and thankfulness: This is a great duty, to the performance whereof we should summon all the powers and faculties of our souls; as the holy Psalmist does, Psal. ciii. 1, 2. "Bless the LORD, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." And we should invite all others to the same work, as the same devout Psalmist frequently does; Psal. cvi. 1. "O give thanks unto the LORD, for he is good; for his mercy endureth for ever." And Psal. cvii. 8. "O that men would praise the LORD for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

And we had need to be often called upon to this duty, to which we have a peculiar backwardness. Necessity drives us to prayer, and sends us to God for the supply of our wants; but praise and thanksgiving is a duty which depends upon our gratitude and ingenuity; and nothing sooner wears off, than the sense of kindness and benefits. We are very apt to forget the blessings of God, not so much from a bad memory, as from a bad nature; to forget the greatest blessings, the continuance whereof should continually put us in mind of them, the blessings of our beings. So God complains of his people, Deut. xxxii. 18. "Of the God that formed thee thou hast been unmindful;" the dignity and excellency of our being above all the creatures of this visible world; Job xxxv. 10, 11. "None saith, Where is God

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“ GOD my maker, who teacheth us more than the
 “ beasts of the earth, and maketh us wiser than the
 “ fowls of heaven?” the daily comforts and blessings of our lives, which we can continually receive, without almost ever looking up to the hand that gives them. So GOD complains by the prophet Hosea, chap. ii. 8, 9. “ She knew not that I gave her corn, and
 “ wine, and oil, and multiplied her silver and gold.” And is it not shameful to see how at the most plentiful tables, the giving of GOD thanks is almost grown out of fashion? as if men were ashamed to own from whence these blessings came. When thanks is all GOD expects from us, can we not afford to give him that? “ Do ye thus requite the LORD,
 “ foolish people, and unwise?” It is just with GOD to take away his blessings from us, if we deny him this easy tribute of praise and thanksgiving.

It is a sign men are unfit for heaven, when they are backward to that which is the proper work and employment of the blessed spirits above. Therefore, as ever we hope to come thither, let us begin this work here, and inure our selves to that which will be the great business of all eternity. Let us, with the four and twenty elders in the Revelation, “ fall down
 “ before him that sits on the throne, and worship
 “ him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast our
 “ crowns before the throne” (that is, cast our selves) and ascribe all glory to GOD, saying, “ Thou art
 “ worthy, O LORD, to receive glory, and honour,
 “ and power; for thou hast made all things, and
 “ for thy pleasure they are, and were created.”

“ To him therefore, the infinite and inexhaustible fountain of goodness, the father of mercies, and
 “ the GOD of all consolation, who gave us such
 “ excel-

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“ excellent beings, having made us little lower than
“ the angels, and crowned us with glory and ho-
“ nour; who hath been pleased to stamp upon us
“ the image of his own goodness, and thereby made
“ us partakers of a divine nature, communicating
“ to us not only of the effects of his goodness, but
“ in some measure and degree of the perfection itself;
“ to him who gives us all things richly to enjoy,
“ which pertain to life and godliness, and hath made
“ such abundant provision, not only for our comfort
“ and convenience in this present life, but for our
“ unspeakable happiness to all eternity; to him who
“ designed this happiness to us from all eternity,
“ and whose mercy and goodness to us endures for
“ ever; who when by wilful transgressions and dis-
“ obedience we had plunged our selves into a state
“ of sin and misery, and had forfeited that happi-
“ ness which we were designed to, was pleased to
“ restore us to a new capacity of it, by sending his
“ only son to take our nature, with the miseries and
“ infirmities of it, to live among us, and to die for
“ us; in a word, to him who is infinitely good to
“ us, not only contrary to our deserts, but beyond
“ our hopes, who renews his mercy upon us every
“ morning, and is patient though we provoke him
“ every day, who preserves and provides for us, and
“ spares us continually, who is always willing, al-
“ ways watchful, and never weary to do us good;
“ to him be all glory and honour, adoration and
“ praise, love and obedience, now and for ever.”

S E R M O N CXLVII.

The mercy of God.

N U M B. xiv. 18.

*The LORD is long-suffering, and of great mercy.*S E R M.
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I Have considered God's goodness in general. There are two eminent branches of it, his patience and mercy. The patience of God is his goodness to them that are guilty, in deferring or moderating their deserved punishment: the mercy of God is his goodness to them that are, or may be miserable. It is the last of these two I design to discourse of at this time; in doing of which, I shall inquire,

First, what we are to understand by the mercy of God.

Secondly, shew you, that this perfection belongs to God.

Thirdly, consider the degree of it, that God is of great mercy.

First, what we are to understand by the mercy of God.

I told you, it is his goodness to them that are in misery, or liable to it; that is, that are in danger of it, or have deserved it. It is mercy, to prevent the misery that we are liable to, and which may befall us, though it be not actually upon us. It is mercy, to defer the misery that we deserve, or mitigate it; and this is, properly, patience and forbearance. It is mercy, to relieve those that are in misery, to support or comfort them. It is mercy,

to

to remit the misery we deserve, and, by pardon and forgiveness, to remove and take away the obligation to punishment.

Thus the mercy of God is usually, in scripture, set forth to us by the affection of pity and compassion; which is an affection that causeth a sensible commotion and disturbance in us, upon the apprehension of some great evil that lies upon another, or hangs over him. Hence it is that God is said, in scripture, to be grieved and afflicted for the miseries of men; his bowels are said to sound, and his heart to turn within him. But though God is pleased in this manner to set forth his mercy and tenderness towards us, yet we must take heed how we clothe the divine nature with the infirmities of human passions. We must not measure the perfection of God by the expressions of his condescension; and because he stoops to our weakness, level him to our infirmities. When God is said to pity us, we must take away the imperfection of this passion, the commotion and disturbance of it, and not imagine any such thing in God; but we are to conceive, that the mercy and compassion of God, without producing the disquiet, do produce the effects of the most sensible pity.

Secondly, that this perfection belongs to God.

All the arguments that I used to prove the goodness of God, from the acknowledgment of natural light, and from scripture and reason, serve to prove that he is merciful; because the mercy of God is an eminent branch of his goodness. I will only produce some of those many texts of scripture which attribute this perfection to God. *Exod. xxxiv. 6.* "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious." *Deut. iv. 31.* "The LORD thy God is a merciful God." *2 Chron. xxxiv. 9.* "the LORD
" your

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“ your GOD is gracious and merciful. Neh. ix. 17. “ Ready to pardon, gracious and merciful.” Pſal. xxv. 10. “ All the paths of the LORD are mercy.” Pſal. lxii. 12. “ Unto thee, O LORD, belongeth “ mercy.” Pſal. ciii. 8. “ Merciful and gracious.” Pſal. cxxx. 7. “ With the LORD there is mercy.” And ſo Jer. iii. 12. Joel ii. 13. Jonah iv. 2. Luke vi. 36. “ Be ye therefore merciful, as your father “ alſo is merciful.” The ſcripture ſpeaks of this as moſt natural to him, 2 Cor. i. 3. he is called “ the “ Father of mercies.” But when he puniſheth, he doth, as it were, relinquish his nature, and do a ſtrange work. “ The LORD will wait that he may “ be gracious,” Iſa. xxx. 18. GOD paſſeth by opportunities of puniſhing, but his mercy takes opportunity to diſplay itſelf; “ he waits to be gracious.” To afflict or puniſh is a work that GOD is unwilling to, that he takes no pleaſure in; Lam. iii. 33. “ He doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men.” But mercy is a work that he delights in, Mic. vii. 18. “ He delighteth in mercy.” When GOD ſhews mercy, he does it with pleaſure and delight; he is ſaid “ to rejoice over his people “ to do them good.” Thoſe attributes that declare GOD’s goodneſs, as when he is ſaid to be gracious, or merciful, and long-ſuffering, they ſhew what GOD is in himſelf, and delights to be: thoſe which declare his wrath and ſeverity, ſhew what he is upon provocation, and the occaſion of ſin; not what he chuſeth to be, but what we do, as it were, compel and neceſſitate him to be.

Thirdly, for the degree of it; that GOD is a GOD of great mercy.

The ſcripture doth delight to advance the mercy of GOD, and does uſe great variety of expreſſion to magni-

magnify it. It speaks of the greatness of his mercy; SERM.
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Numb. xiv. 19. "According unto the greatness
"of thy mercy," 2 Sam. xxiv. 14. "Let me fall
"into the hands of the LORD, for his mercies are
"great." It is called an abundant mercy; 1 Pet. i.
3. "According to his abundant mercy." Psal. ciii.
8. he is said to be "plenteous in mercy;" and
"rich in mercy." Eph. ii. 4. Psal. v. 7. he speaks
of "the multitude of God's mercies;" and of the
variety of them, Neh. ix. 19. "In thy manifold
"mercies thou forsookest them not." So many are
they, that we are said to be surrounded and compas-
sed about on every side with them; Psal. ciii. 4.
"Who crowneth thee with loving kindness, and
"tender mercies."

And yet farther to set forth the greatness of them,
the scripture useth all dimensions. Height; Psal. lvii.
10. "Thy mercy is great unto the heavens." Nay,
higher yet; Psal. cviii. 4. "Thy mercy is great
"above the heavens." For the latitude and extent
of it, it is as large as the earth, and extends to all
the creatures in it; Psal. cxix. 64. "The earth, O
"LORD, is full of thy mercy." Psal. cxlv. 9. "His
"tender mercies are over all his works." For the
length, or duration and continuance of it; Exod.
xxxiv. 7. "Laying up mercy in store for thousands
"of generations," one after another. Nay, it is
of a longer continuance; Psal. cxviii. it is several
times repeated, that "his mercy endureth for ever."

And to shew the intense degree of this affection
of mercy or pity, the scripture useth several empha-
tical expressions to set it forth to us. The scripture
speaks of the tender mercies of God, Psal. xxv. 6.
"Remember, O LORD, thy tender mercies." Yea,
of the multitude of these; Psal. li. 1. "According
"unto

“unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out
 “my transgressions.” Jam. v. 11. “The LORD is
 “very pitiful, and of tender mercy.” They are
 called God’s bowels, which are the tenderest parts,
 and apt to yern and stir in us when any affections of
 love and pity are excited; Is. lxiii. 15. “Where is
 “the sounding of thy bowels, and of thy mercies
 “towards me? are they restrained?” Luke i. 78.
 “Through the tender mercy of our God; so it is
 in our translation: but if we render it from the ori-
 ginal, it is “through the bowels of the mercies of
 “our God.” How doth God condescend, in those
 pathetical expressions which he useth concerning his
 people? Hos. xi. 8. “How shall I give thee up,
 “Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how
 “shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee
 “as Zeboim? mine heart is turned within me, and
 “my repentings are kindled together.” Nay, to ex-
 press his tender sense of our miseries and sufferings,
 he is represented as being afflicted with us, and bear-
 ing a part in our sufferings; Isa. lxiii. 9. “In all
 “their afflictions he was afflicted.”

The compassions of God are compared to the
 tenderest affections among men: to that of a father
 towards his children; Psal. ciii. 13. “Like as a fa-
 “ther pitieth his children, so the LORD pitieth them
 “that fear him. Nay, to the compassions of a mother
 towards her infant: Isa. xlix. 50. “Can a woman
 “forget her sucking child, that she should not have
 “compassion on the son of her womb?” Yea, she
 may, it is possible, though most unlikely: but though
 a mother may turn unnatural, yet God cannot be
 unmerciful.

In short, the scripture doth every where magnify
 the mercy of God, and speak of it with all possible
 advan-

advantage ; as if the divine nature, which doth in all perfections excel all others, did in this excel itself.

The scripture speaks of it as if God was wholly taken up with it, as if it was his constant exercise and employment, so that, in comparison of it, he doth hardly display any other excellency ; Psal. xxv. 10. " All the paths of the LORD are mercy ;" as if, in this world, God had a design to advance his mercy above his other attributes. The mercy of God is now in the throne ; this is the day of mercy ; and God doth display it, many times, with a seeming dishonour to his other attributes, his justice, and holiness, and truth. His justice ; this makes Job complain of the long life and prosperity of the wicked ; Job xxi. 7. " Wherefore do the wicked live, yea, become old ? &c. His holiness ; this makes the prophet expostulate with God, Hab. i. 13. " Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity ; wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue ?" &c. And the truth of God ; this makes Jonah complain, as if God's mercies were such as did make some reflection upon his truth, Jon. iv. 2.

But that we may have more distinct apprehensions of the greatness and number of God's mercies, I will distribute them into kinds, and rank them under several heads. It is mercy, to prevent those evils and miseries that we are liable to : it is mercy, to defer those evils that we have deserved, or to mitigate them : it is mercy, to support and comfort us when misery is upon us : it is mercy, to deliver us from them : but the greatest mercy of all is, to remit the evil and misery we have deserved, by pardon and forgiveness, to remove and take away the obligation

S E R M. to punishment. So that the mercy of God may be
 CXLVII. reduced to these five heads.

I. Preventing mercy. Many evils and miseries which we are liable to, God prevents them at a great distance; and when they are coming towards us, he stops them, or turns them another way. The merciful providence of God, and those invisible guards which protect us, do divert many evils from us, which fall upon others. We seldom take notice of God's preventing mercy; we are not apt to be sensible how great a mercy it is to be freed from those straits and necessities, those pains and diseases of body, those inward racks and horrors, which others are pressed withal, and labour under. When any evil or misery is upon us, would we not reckon it a mercy to be rescued and delivered from it? And is it not a greater mercy that we never felt it? Does not that man owe more to his physician, who prevents his sickness and distemper, than he who, after the weakness and languishing, the pains and tortures of several months, is at length cured by him?

II. Forbearing mercy. And this is the patience of God, which consists in the deferring or moderating of our deserved punishment. Hence it is, that "slow to anger, and of great mercy," do so often go together. But this I shall speak to hereafter in some particular discourses.

III. Comforting mercy. 2 Cor. i. 3. "The father of mercies, and the God of all comfort." The scripture represents God as very merciful, in comforting and supporting those that are afflicted and cast down: hence are those expressions of "putting his arms under us, bearing us up, speaking comfortably, visiting us with his loving kindness:" which signify God's merciful regard to those who are in misery and distress.

IV. His

IV His relieving mercy, in supplying those that are in want, and delivering those that are in trouble.

God doth, many times, exercise men with trouble and afflictions, with a very gracious and merciful design; to prevent greater evils, which men would otherwise bring upon themselves. Afflictions are a merciful invention of heaven to do us that good, which nothing else can; they awaken us to a sense of God, and of our selves, to a consideration of the evil of our ways; they make us to take notice of God, to seek him, and to inquire after him. God doth, as it were, by afflictions, throw men upon their backs, to make them look up to heaven. Hof. v. 15. "In their affliction they will seek me early." Psal. lxxviii. 34. "When he slew them, then they sought him, and they returned and inquired early after God." But God does not delight in this; "he doth not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." When afflictions have accomplished their work, and obtained their end upon us, God is very ready to remove them, and command deliverance for us; Isa. liv. 7, 8. "For a small moment have I forsaken thee, but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment, but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the LORD thy redeemer."

V. Pardoning mercy. And here the greatness and fulness of God's mercy appears, because our sins are great: Psal. lxxviii. 38. "Being full of compassion, he forgave their iniquity." And the multitude of God's mercies, because our sins are many; Psal. li. 1. "Have mercy, upon me, O God, according unto thy loving-kindness; according to the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions."

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“ sions.” Exod. xxxiv. 7. he is said “ to pardon iniquity, transgression, and sin.” How manifold are his mercies, to forgive all our sins, of what kind soever! The mercy of God to us in pardoning our sins, is matter of astonishment and admiration; Mic. vii. 18. “ Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity!” But especially if we consider by what means our pardon is procured; by transferring our guilt upon the most innocent person, the son of God, and making him “ to bear our iniquities,” and to suffer the wrath of God which was due to us. The admirable contrivance of God’s mercy appears in this dispensation; this shews the riches of his grace, that he should be at so much cost to purchase our pardon; “ not with corruptible things, as silver and gold; “ but with the precious blood of his own son;” Eph. i. 6, 7. “ To the praise of the glory of his “ grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the “ beloved; in whom we have redemption through “ his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to “ the riches of his grace.”

Having dispatched the three particulars I proposed to be spoken to, I shall shew what use we ought to make of this divine attribute.

Use 1. We ought with thankfulness to acknowledge and admire the great mercy of God to us. Let us view it in all it’s dimensions; the height, and length, and breadth of it: in all the variety and kinds of it; the preventing mercy of God to many of us. Those miseries that lye upon others, it is mercy to us that we escaped them. It is mercy that spares us. “ It is of the LORD’s mercies that we are not consumed, and because his compassions fail not.” It is mercy that mitigates our punishment, and makes it fall below the desert of our sins. It is mercy that

comforts

comforts and supports us under any of those evils that lye upon us, and that rescues and delivers us from them. Which way soever we look, we are encompassed with the mercies of God; they "compass us about on every side; we are crowned with "loving-kindness, and tender mercies." It is mercy that feeds us, and clothes us, and that preserves us. But, above all, we should thankfully acknowledge and admire the pardoning mercy of God; Psal. ciii. 1, 2, 3. where David does, as it were, muster up the mercies of God, and make a catalogue of them; he sets the pardoning mercy in the front; "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and all that "is within me bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, "O my soul, and forget not all his benefits; who "forgiveth all thy iniquities."

If we look into our selves, and consider our own temper and disposition, how void of pity and bowels we are, how cruel, and hard-hearted, and insolent, and revengeful; if we look abroad in the world, and see how "full the earth is of the habitations of "cruelty;" we shall admire the mercy of God more, and think our selves more beholden to it. How many things must concur to make our hearts tender and melt our spirits, and stir our bowels, to make us pitiful and compassionate? We seldom pity any, unless they be actually in misery; nor all such neither, unless the misery they lye under be very great; nor then neither, unless the person that suffers be nearly related, and we be some ways concerned in his sufferings; yea, many times not then neither upon a generous account, but as we are some ways obliged by interest and self-love, and a dear regard to our selves, when we have suffered the like our selves, and have learned to pity others by our own

own sufferings, or when in danger or probability to be in the like condition our selves ; so many motives and obligations are necessary to awaken and stir up this affection in us. But GOD is merciful and pitiful to us out of the mere goodness of his nature ; for few of these motives and considerations can have any place in him. This affection of pity and tenderness is stirred up in GOD by the mere presence of the object, without any other inducement. The mercy of GOD, many times, doth not stay till we be actually miserable ; but looks forward a great way, and pities us at a great distance, and prevents our misery. GOD doth not only pity us in great calamities ; but considers those lesser evils that are upon us. GOD is merciful to us, when we have deserved all the evils that are upon us ; and far greater, when we are “ less than the least of all his mercies,” when we deserved all the misery that is upon us, and have with violent hands pulled it upon our own heads, and have been the authors and procurers of it to our selves. Though GOD, in respect of his nature, be at an infinite distance from us ; yet his mercy is near to us, and he cannot possibly have any self-interest in it. The divine nature is not liable to want, or injury, or suffering ; he is secure of his own happiness and fulness, and can neither wish the enlargement, nor fear the impairment of his estate ; he can never stand in need of pity or relief from us, or any other, and yet he pities us.

Now if we consider the vast difference of this affection in GOD and us, how tender his mercies are, and how sensible his bowels ; and yet we who have so many arguments to move us to pity, how hard our hearts are, and how unapt to relent, as if we were born of the rock, and were the off-spring of the

the nether milstone; sure, when we duly consider this, we cannot but admire the mercy of God.

How cruel are we to creatures below us! with how little remorse can we kill a flea, or tread upon a worm? partly because we are secure that they cannot hurt us, nor revenge themselves upon us; and partly because they are so despicable in our eyes, and so far below us, that they do not fall under the consideration of our pity. Look upward, proud man! and take notice of him who is above thee: thou didst not make the creatures below thee, as God did; there's but a finite distance between thee and the meanest creatures; but there's an infinite distance between thee and God. Man is a name of dignity, when we compare our selves with other creatures; but compared to God, "we are worms, and not men;" yea, we are nothing, yea, "less than nothing, and vanity." How great then is the mercy of God, which regards us, who are so far below him, which takes into consideration such inconsiderable nothings as we are! We may say with David, Psal. viii. 4. "LORD, what is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou visitest him?" and with Job, chap. vii. 17. "What is man, that thou shouldest magnify him, and that thou shouldest set thine heart upon him?"

And then how hard do we find it to forgive those who have injured us? If any one have offended, or provoked us, how hard are we to be reconciled? How mindful of an injury? How do anger and revenge boil within us? How do we upbraid men with their faults? What vile and low submission do we require of them, before we will receive them into favour, and grant them peace? And if we forgive once, we think that is much; but if an offence and
provo-

provocation be renewed often, we are inexorable. Even the disciples of our SAVIOUR, after he had so emphatically taught them forgiveness, in the petition of the LORD's prayer, yet they had very narrow spirits as to this; Matth. xviii. 21. Peter comes to him, and asks him, "How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? till seven times?" He thought that was much: And yet we have great obligations to pardoning and forgiving others, because we are obnoxious to God and one another: we shall many times stand in need of pardon from God and men; and it may be our own case; and when it is, we are too apt to be very indulgent to our selves, and conceive good hopes of the mercy of others; we would have our ignorance, and inadvertencies, and mistakes, and all occasions, and temptations, and provocations considered; and when we have done amiss, upon submission, and acknowledgment of our fault, we would be received into favour: but God, who is not at all liable to us, how ready he is to forgive! If we confess our sins to him, he is merciful to forgive: he pardons freely; and such are the condescensions of his mercy, though he be the party offended, yet he offers pardon to us, and beseeches us to be reconciled: if we do but come towards him, he runs to meet us, as in the parable of the prodigal, Luke xv. 20. What reason have we then thankfully to acknowledge and admire the mercy of God to us?

Use 2. The great mercy of God to us, should stir up in us shame and sorrow for sin. The judgments of God may break us; but the consideration of God's mercy should rather melt and dissolve us into tears: Luke vii. 47. the woman that washed CHRIST's feet with her tears, and wiped them with her

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her hair, the account that our SAVIOUR gives of the great affection that she expressed to him, was, " she loved much, because much was forgiven her;" and she grieved much, because much was forgiven her.

Especially we should sorrow for those sins which have been committed by us after GOD's mercies received. Mercies after sins should touch our hearts, and make us relent: it should grieve us that we should offend and provoke a GOD so gracious and merciful, slow to anger, and so ready to forgive: but sin against mercies, and after we have received them, is attended with one of the greatest aggravations of sin. And as mercy raises the guilt of our sins, so it should raise our sorrow for them. No consideration is more apt to work upon human nature, than that of kindness; and the greater mercy has been shewed to us, the greater our sins, and the greater cause of sorrow for them; contraries do illustrate, and set off one another; in the great goodness and mercy of GOD to us, we see the great evil of our sins against him.

Every sin has the nature of rebellion and disobedience; but sins against mercy have ingratitude in them. Whenever we break the laws of GOD, we rebel against our sovereign; but as we sin against the mercies of GOD, we injure our benefactor. This makes our sin to be horrid, and astonishing, Isa. i. 2. " Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth: for the LORD hath spoken, I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against me." All the mercies of GOD are aggravations of our sins; 2 Sam. xii. 7, 8, 9. " And Nathan said to David, thou art the man. Thus saith the LORD GOD of Israel, I anointed thee king over Is-

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"rael,

“rael, and I delivered thee out of the hand of Saul,
 “and I gave thee thy master’s house, and thy master’s
 “wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of
 “Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too lit-
 “tle, I would moreover have given unto thee such
 “and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised
 “the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his
 “fight?” God reckons up all his mercies, and from
 them aggravates David’s sin; 1 Kings xi. 9. he takes
 notice of all the unkind returns that we make to his
 mercy: and it is the worst temper in the world not
 to be wrought upon by kindness, not to be melted
 by mercy: no greater evidence of a wicked heart,
 than that the mercies of God have no effects upon it;
 Isai. xxvi. 10. “Let favour be shewed to the wick-
 “ed, yet will he not learn righteousness.”

Use 3. Let us imitate the merciful nature of God.
 This branch of God’s goodness is very proper for
 our imitation. The general exhortation of our SA-
 VIOUR, Matt. v. 48. “Be ye therefore perfect, e-
 “ven as your Father which is in heaven is perfect;”
 is more particularly expressed by St. Luke, chap. vi.
 36. “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also
 “is merciful.” Men affect to make images, and
 impossible representations of God; but, as Seneca
 saith, *Crede deos, cum propitii essent, fictiles fuisse.*
 We may draw this image and likeness of God; we
 may be gracious and merciful as he is. CHRIST,
 who was “the express image of his Father,” his
 whole life and undertaking was a continued work
 of mercy; “he went about doing good” to the
 souls of men, by preaching the gospel to them;
 and to the bodies of men, in healing all man-
 ner of diseases: there is nothing that he recom-
 mends more to us, in his gospel, than this spi-
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rit and temper; Mat. v. 7. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." How many parables doth he use, to set forth the mercy of God to us, with a design to draw us to the imitation of it? The parable of the prodigal; of the good Samaritan; of the servant to whom he forgave ten thousand talents. We should imitate God in this, in being tender and compassionate to those that are in misery.

This is a piece of natural, indispensable religion, to which positive and instituted religion must give way. Amos vi. 6. "I desired mercy, and not sacrifice;" which is twice cited and used by our SAVIOUR. Micah vi. 9. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what it is that the LORD thy God requires of thee; to do justice, and love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God."

This is always one part of the description of a good man, that he is apt to pity the miseries and necessities of others; Psal. xxxvii. 26. "He is ever merciful, and lendeth." He is far from cruelty, not only to men, but even to the brute creatures; Prov. xii. 10. "A righteous man regardeth the life of his beast." There is nothing more contrary to the nature of God, than a cruel and savage disposition, not to be affected with the miseries and sufferings of others: how unlike is this to "the Father of mercies, and the God of consolation!" When we can see cruelty exercised, and our bowels not be stirred within us, nor our hearts be pricked; how unlike is this to God, who is "very pitiful, and of tender mercies!" But to rejoice at the miseries of others, this is inhuman and barbarous. Hear how God threatens Edom for rejoicing at the miseries of his brother Jacob; Obadiah ver. 10, 11, 12, 13, 14. But to delight to make others miserable,

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and to aggravate their sufferings, this is devilish; this is the temper of hell, and the very spirit of the destroyer.

It becomes man, above all other creatures, to be merciful, who hath had such ample and happy experience of God's mercy to him, and doth still continually stand in need of mercy from God. God hath been very merciful to us. Had it not been for the tender mercies of God to us, we had all of us long since been miserable. Now as we have received mercy from God, we should shew it to others. The apostle useth this as an argument why we should relieve those that are in misery and want, because we have had such experience of the mercy and love of God to us; 1 John iii. 16, 17. "Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us. But whoso hath this world's good and seeth his brother have need, &c. how dwelleth the love of God in him?" That man hath no sense of the mercy of God abiding upon his heart, that is not merciful to his brother. And it is an argument why we should forgive one another; Eph. iv. 32. "Be ye kind one to another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God for CHRIST's sake hath forgiven you." Chap. v. 1. "Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children." Col. iii. 12, 13. "Put on therefore (as the elect of God, holy and beloved) bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering; forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any: even as CHRIST forgave you, so also do ye."

And we continually stand in need of mercy both from God and man. We are liable one to another, and in the change of human affairs, we may be all sub-

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subject to one another by turns, and stand in need of one another's pity and compassion; and we must expect, that "with what measure we mete to others, with the same it shall be measured to us again." To restrain the cruelties, and check the insolencies of men, God hath so ordered, in his providence, that very often, in this world, mens cruelties return upon their own heads, and their violent dealings upon their own pates. Bajazet meets with a Tamerlane.

But if men were not thus liable to one another, we all stand in need of mercy from God. If we be merciful to others in suffering, and forgive them that have injured us, God will be so to us, he will pardon our sins to us: Prov. xvi. 6. "By mercy and truth iniquity is purged." 2 Sam. xxii. 26. "With the merciful thou wilt shew thy self merciful." Prov. xiv. 21. "He that hath mercy on the poor, happy is he." Prov. xxi. 21. "He that followeth after righteousness and mercy, findeth life." Matth. vi. 14. "If ye forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you," But on the other hand, if we be malicious and revengeful, and implacable to those that have offended us, and inexorable to those who desire to be received to favour, and cruel to those who lye at our mercy, hard-hearted to them that are in necessity; what can we expect, but that the mercy of God will leave us, that he will "forget to be gracious, and shut up in anger his tender mercy." Matt. vi. 15. "If ye forgive not men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." That is a dreadful passage, St. James ii. 13. "He shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy." How angry is the LORD with the servant who was so inexorable to his fellow-servant, after

after he had forgiven him so great a debt, as you find in the parable, Mat. xviii. 24. He owed him ten thousand talents, and, upon his submission and intreaty to have patience with him, he was moved with compassion, and loosed him, and forgave him all: but no sooner had this favour been done to him by his LORD, but, going forth, he meets his fellow-servant, who owed him a small, inconsiderable debt, an hundred pence; he lays hands on him, and takes him by the throat, and roundly demands payment of him: he falls down at his feet, and useth the same form of supplication that he had used to his LORD; but he rejects his request, and puts him in prison. Now what saith the LORD to him? ver. 32, 33, 34. "O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me. Shouldest not thou also have had compassion on thy fellow-servant, even as I had pity on thee? And his LORD was wroth, and delivered him to the tormentors, till he should pay all that was due unto him." Now what application doth our SAVIOUR make of this? ver. 35. "So likewise shall my heavenly Father do also unto you, if ye from your hearts forgive not every one his brother their trespasses."

God's readiness to forgive us should be a powerful motive and argument to us to forgive others. The greatest injuries that we can suffer from men, if we compare them to the sins that we commit against God, they bear no proportion to them, neither in weight nor number; they are but as an hundred pence to ten thousand talents. If we would be like God, we should forgive the greatest injuries; he pardoneth our sins, though they be exceeding great; many injuries; though offences be renewed, and provocations multiplied: for so God doth to us;

He pardoneth iniquity, transgression and sin," Ex. xxxiv. 7. Isa. lv. 7. "He will have mercy, he will abundantly pardon." We would not have God only to forgive us seven times, but seventy times seven, as often as we offend him; so should we forgive our brother.

And we should not be backward to this work; God is "ready to forgive us," Neh. ix. 17. And we should do it heartily, not only in word, when we retain malice in our hearts, and while we say we forgive, carry on a secret design in our hearts of revenging our selves when we have opportunity: but we should from our hearts forgive every one; for so God doth to us, who when he forgives us, "casts our iniquities behind his back, and throws them into the bottom of the sea, and blots out our transgression, so as to remember our iniquity no more."

If we do not thus, every time we put up the petition to God, "forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us," we do not pray for mercy, but for judgment; we invoke his wrath, and do not put up a prayer, but a dreadful imprecation against our selves; we pronounce the sentence of our own condemnation, and importune God not to forgive us.

Use. 4. If the mercy of God be so great, this may comfort us against despair. Sinners are apt to be dejected, when they consider their unworthiness, the nature and number of their sins, and the many heavy aggravations of them; they are apt to say, with Cain, that "their sin is greater than can be forgiven." But do not look only upon thy sins, but upon the mercies of God. Thou canst not be too sensible of the evil of sin, and of the desert of it; but whilst we aggravate our sins, we must not lessen the

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the mercies of God. When we consider the multitude of our sins, we must consider also the multitude of God's tender mercies: we have been great sinners, and God is of great mercy; we have multiplied our provocations, and he multiplies to pardon

Do but thou put thy self in a capacity of mercy, by repenting of thy sins, and forsaking of them, and thou hast no reason to doubt but the mercy of God will receive thee; "If we confess our sins, he is merciful and faithful to forgive them." If we had offended man, as we have done God, we might despair of pardon; but it is God, and not man, that we have to deal with: and "his ways are not as our ways, nor his thoughts as our thoughts: but as the heavens are high above the earth, so are his ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our thoughts."

We cannot be more injurious to God, than by hard thoughts of him, as if fury were in him, and, when we have provoked him, he were not to be appeased and reconciled to us. We disparage the goodness and truth of God, when we distrust those gracious declarations which he has made of his mercy and goodness; if we do not think that he doth heartily pity and compassionate sinners, and really desire their happiness. Doth not he condescend so low as to represent himself afflicted for the miseries of men, and to rejoice in the conversion of a sinner? and shall not we believe that he is in good earnest? Doth CHRIST weep over impenitent sinners, because "they will not know the things of their peace?" and canst thou think he will not pardon thee, upon thy repentance? Is he grieved that men will undo themselves, and will not be saved? and canst thou think that he is unwilling to forgive? We cannot ho-

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nour and glorify God more, than by entertaining great thoughts of his mercy. As we are said to glorify God by our repentance, because thereby we acknowledge God's holiness and justice; so we glorify him by believing his mercy, because we conceive a right opinion of his goodness and truth; we set to our seal, that God is merciful and true; Psal. cxlvii. 11. it is said, that "God takes pleasure in them that hope in his mercy." As he delights in mercy, so in our acknowledgments of it; that sinners should conceive great hopes of it, and believe him to be what he is. Provided thou dost submit to the terms of God's mercy, thou hast no reason to despair of it; and he that thinks that his sins are more, or greater than the mercy of God can pardon, must think that there may be more evil in the creature than there is goodness in God.

Use 5. By way of caution against the presumptuous sinner. If there be any that trespass upon the goodness of God, and presume to encourage themselves in sin, upon the hopes of his mercy; let such know, that God is just, as well as merciful. A god of all mercy is an idol, such a god as men set up in their own imaginations; but not the true God, whom the scriptures describe. To such persons the scripture describes him after another manner; Nah. i. 2. "God is jealous; the LORD revengeth, and is furious; the LORD will take vengeance on his adversaries, and reserveth wrath for his enemies. If any man abuse the mercy of God, to the strengthening of himself in his own wickedness, and bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, and add drunkenness to thirst: the LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD

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“ and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and
 “ all the curses that are written in this book shall
 “ lye upon him, and the LORD will blot out his
 “ name from under heaven,” Deut. xxix. 19, 20.

Though it be the nature of God to be merciful, yet the exercise of his mercy is regulated by his wisdom; he will not be merciful to those that despise his mercy, to those that abuse it, to those that are resolved to go on in their sins to tempt his mercy, and make bold to say, “ Let us sin, that grace may abound.” God designs his mercy for those that are prepared to receive it; Isa. lv. 7. “ Let the wicked forsake his ways, and the unrighteous man his thoughts, and turn unto the LORD, and he will have mercy, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon.” The mercy of God is an enemy to sin, as well as his justice; and it is no where offered to countenance sin, but to convert the sinner; and is not intended to encourage our impenitency, but our repentance. God hath no where said that he will be merciful to those who, upon the score of his mercy, are bold with him, and presume to offend him; but “ the mercy of the LORD is upon them that fear him, and keep his covenant, and remember his commandments to do them. There is forgiveness with him, that he may be feared;” but not that he may be despised and affronted. This is to contradict the very end of God’s mercy, which is, to lead us to repentance, to engage us to leave our sins, not to encourage us to continue in them.

Take heed then of abusing the mercy of God: we cannot provoke the justice of God more, than by presuming upon his mercy. This is the time of God’s mercy; use this opportunity: if thou neglectest it, a day of justice and vengeance is coming;

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The mercy of God.

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Rom. ii. 4, 5. "Despiseſt thou the riches of his
"goodneſs, and forbearance, and long-ſuffering,
"not knowing that the goodneſs of God leads to
"repentance? And treaſureſt up unto thy ſelf wrath
"againſt the day of wrath, and the revelation of
"the righteous judgment of God?" Now is the
manifeſtation of God's mercy; but there is a time a
coming, when the righteous judgment of God will
be revealed againſt thoſe who abuſe his mercy, "not
"knowing that the goodneſs of God leadeth to re-
"pentance." To think that the goodneſs of God
was intended for any other end than to take us off
from ſin, is a groſs and affected ignorance that will
ruin us; and they who draw any concluſion from the
mercy of God, which may harden them in their ſins,
they are ſuch as the prophet ſpeaks of, *Iſ. xxvii. 11.*
"A people of no underſtanding; therefore he that
"made them will not have mercy on them; and he
"that formed them will ſhew them no favour." Mercy
itſelf will rejoice in the ruin of thoſe that abuſe
it, and it will aggravate their condemnation. There
is no perſon towards whom God will be more ſevere-
ly juſt, than towards ſuch. The juſtice of God,
exasperated and ſet on by his injured and abuſed mer-
cy, like a razor ſet in oil, will have the keener edge,
and be the ſharper for it's ſmoothneſs. Thoſe that
have made the mercy of God their enemy, muſt ex-
pect the worſt his juſtice can do unto them.

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The patience of God.

2 P E T. iii. 9.

The LORD is not slack concerning his promise, (as some men count slackness) but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

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IN the beginning of this chapter the apostle puts the Christians, to whom he writes, in mind of the predictions of the ancient prophets, and of the apostles of our LORD and SAVIOUR, concerning the general judgment of the world, which by many (and, perhaps, by the apostles themselves) had been thought to be very near, and that it would presently follow the destruction of Jerusalem; but he tells them, that before that, there would arise a certain sect, or sort of men, that would deride the expectation of a future judgment, designing, probably, the Carpocratians (a branch of that large sect of the Gnosticks) of whom St. Austin expressly says, that they denied the resurrection, and, consequently, a future judgment. These St. Peter calls scoffers, ver. iii. 4. "Knowing
 " this first, that there shall come in the last days
 " scoffers, walking after their own lusts, and saying,
 " where is the promise of his coming?" The word is ἐπαγγελία, which signifies a declaration in general, whether it be by way of promise or threatening. What is become of that declaration of CHRIST so frequently repeated in the gospel, concerning his com-

ing to judgment? "For since the fathers fell asleep," or, "saying that the fathers are fallen asleep," except only that men die, and one generation succeeds another, "all things continue as they were from the creation of the world;" that is, the world continues still as it was from the beginning, and there is no sign of any such change and alteration as is foretold. To this he answers two things:

1. That these scoffers, though they took themselves to be wits, did betray great ignorance, both of the condition of the world, and of the nature of God. They talked very ignorantly concerning the world, when they said, "All things continued as they were from the creation of it," when so remarkable a change had already happened, as the destruction of it by water; and therefore the prediction concerning the destruction of it by fire, before the great and terrible day of judgment, was no ways incredible. And they shewed themselves likewise very ignorant of the perfection of the divine nature; to which, being eternally the same, a thousand years, and one day, are all one: and if God make good his word some thousands of years hence, it will make no sensible difference concerning his eternal duration; it being no matter when a duration begins, which is never to have an end; ver. 8. "Be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the LORD as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." This, it seems, was a common saying among the Jews, to signify, that to the eternity of God, no finite duration bears any proportion; and therefore, with regard to eternity, it is all one whether it be a thousand years, or one day. The Psalmist hath an expression much to the same purpose, Psal. xc. 4. "For a thousand years in thy sight are
" but

“ but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch
 “ in the night.” And the son of Sirach likewise
 Eccclus. xviii. 10. “ As a drop of water to the sea,
 “ and as a grain of sand to the sea-shore, so are
 “ thousand years to the days of eternity.” The like
 expression we meet with in heathen writers ; “ to the
 “ god’s no time is long,” saith Pythagoras : And
 Plutarch, “ the whole space of a man’s life, to the
 “ gods, is as nothing.” And in his excellent discourse
 of the slowness of the divine vengeance, (the very
 argument St. Peter is here upon) he hath this passage
 “ that a thousand, or ten thousand years, are but as
 “ an indivisible point to an infinite duration.” And
 therefore, when the judgment is to be eternal, the
 delay of it, though it were for a thousand years, is
 an objection of no force, against either the certainty
 or the terror of it ; for, to eternity, all time is equal-
 ly short ; and it matters not when the punishment
 of sinners begins, if it shall never have an end.

2. But because the distance between the declaration
 of a future judgment, and the coming of it, though
 it be nothing to God, yet it seemed long to them :
 therefore he gives such an account of it, as doth not
 in the least impeach the truth and faithfulness of God,
 but is a clear argument and demonstration of his
 goodness. Admitting what they said to be true,
 that God delays judgment for a great while, yet
 this gives no ground to conclude that judgment will
 never be ; but it shews the great goodness of God
 to sinners, that he gives them so long a space of re-
 pentance, that so they may prevent the terror of that
 day, whenever it comes, and escape that dreadful
 ruin, which will certainly overtake, sooner or later,
 all impenitent sinners : “ The LORD is not slack
 “ concerning his promise ;” that is, as to the de-
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claration which he hath made of a future judgment, as some men account slackness ;” That is, as if the delay of judgment were an argument it would never come. This is a false inference from the delay of punishment, and an ill interpretation of the goodness of God to sinners, who bears long with them, and delays judgment, on purpose to give men time to repent, and, by repentance, to prevent their own eternal ruin ; “ God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness ; but he is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.” In the handling of these words, I shall do these three things :

First, I shall consider the patience and long-suffering of God, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature ; “ God is long-suffering to us-ward.”

Secondly, I shall shew, that the patience of God, and the delay of judgment, is no just ground why sinners should hope for impunity, as the scoffers, here foretold by the apostle, argued, that because our Lord delayeth his coming to judgment so long, therefore he would never come ; “ God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness.”

Thirdly, I will consider the true reason of God’s patience and long-suffering towards mankind, which the apostle here gives ; “ he is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

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I. I shall

I. I shall shew what is meant by the patience and long-suffering of God.

II. That this is a perfection of the divine nature.

III. I shall give some proof and demonstration of the great patience and long-suffering of God to mankind.

I. What is meant by the patience and long-suffering of God.

The Hebrew word signifies one that keeps his anger long, or that is long before he is angry. In the new testament it is sometimes expressed by the word ὑπομονή, which signifies God's forbearance, and patient waiting for our repentance; sometimes by the word ἀνοχή, which signifies God's holding in his wrath, and restraining himself from punishing; and sometimes by μακροθυμία, which signifies the extent of his patience, his long-suffering, and forbearing for a long time the punishment due to sinners.

So that the patience of God is his goodness to sinners, in deferring or moderating the punishment due to them for their sins; the deferring of deserved punishment in whole, or in part, which, if it be extended to a long time, it is properly his long-suffering; and the moderating, as well as the deferring of the punishment due to sin, is an instance likewise of God's patience; and not only the deferring and moderating of temporal punishment, but the adjourning of the eternal misery of sinners, is a principal instance of God's patience; so that the patience of God takes in all that space of repentance which God affords to sinners in this life; nay, all temporal judgments and afflictions which befall sinners in this life, and are short of cutting them off, and turning them into hell, are comprehended in the patience of God. Whenever God punisheth, "it is of his great mer-

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mary perfections: and it is only when these fail, and
have no effect upon us, but are abused by us, to the
encouragement of our selves in an impenitent course,
that his justice takes place.

Nay, even among men, it is esteemed a perfecti-

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on to be able to forbear and to restrain our anger; passion is impotency and folly, but patience is power and wisdom; Prov. xiv. 29. "He that is slow to wrath, is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly;" Prov. xvi. 32. "He that is slow to anger, is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit, than he that taketh a city." Rom. xii. 21. "Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good." To be impatient is to be overcome, but to forbear anger and revenge is victory. Patience is an argument of great power and command of our selves; and therefore God himself, who is the most powerful being, is slow to anger, and of infinite patience; and nothing doth more declare the power of God, than his patience; that when he is provoked by such vile and despicable creatures as we are, he can withhold his hand from destroying us. This is the argument which Moses useth, Numb. xiv. 17, 18. that the power of God doth so eminently appear in his patience; "And now, I beseech thee, let the power of my LORD be great, according as thou hast spoken, saying, the LORD is gracious, and long-suffering." And yet power, where it is not restrained by wisdom and goodness, is a great temptation to anger; because where there is power, there is something to back it, and make it good. And therefore the psalmist doth recommend and set off the patience of God, from the consideration of his power; Psal. vii. 11. "God is strong, and patient; God is provoked every day;" God is strong, and therefore patient; or, he is infinitely patient, notwithstanding his almighty power to revenge the daily provocations of his creatures.

Among men, anger and weakness commonly go

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together; but they are ill matched, as is excellently observed by the son of Sirach, Eccles. x. 18. "Pride was not made for man, nor furious anger for him that is born of a woman." So that anger and impatience is every where unreasonable: where there is power, impatience is below it, and a thing too mean for omnipotency; and where there wants power, anger is above it: it is too much for a weak and impotent creature to be angry. Where there is power, anger is needless, and of no use; and where there is no power, it is vain, and to no purpose. So that patience is every where a perfection, both in God and man. I proceed to the

III^d Thing I propos'd, which was, to give some proof and demonstration of the great patience and long-suffering of God to mankind. And this will evidently appear, if we consider these two things:

1. How men deal with God.
2. How notwithstanding this, God deals with them.

1. How men deal with God. Every day we highly offend and provoke him, we grieve and weary him with our iniquities, as the expression is in the prophet, Isa. xliii. 24. "thou hast made me to serve with thy sins; thou hast wearied me with thine iniquities." Every sin that we commit is an affront to the divine majesty, and a contempt of his authority: by denying submission to his laws we question his omnipresence, and say, "doth God see? and is there knowledge in the most High?" Or if we acknowledge his omnipresence, and that he regards what we do, the provocation is still the greater; because then we affront him to his face; we dare his justice, and challenge his omnipotency, and provoke the Lord to jealousy, as if we were stronger than he.

Is not God patient, when "the whole world lies

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“ in wickedness,” and “ the earth is overspread
 “ with violence,” and “ is full of the habitations of
 “ cruelty?” when he who is “ of purer eyes than
 “ to behold iniquity,” and is so highly offended at
 the sins of men, hath yet the patience to look upon
 “ them that deal treacherously, and to hold his
 “ peace?” when the “ wicked persecutes and de-
 “ vours the man that is more righteous than he?”
 when even that part of the world, which professeth the
 name of God and CHRIST, do, by their vile and ab-
 ominable lives, “ blaspheme that holy and glorious
 “ name whereby they are called?”

Every moment God hath greater injuries done to
 him, and more affronts put upon him, than were
 ever offered to all the sons of men: and, surely, pro-
 vocations are trials of patience, especially when they
 are so numerous, and so heinous; for if offences
 rise according to the dignity of the person injured,
 and the meanness of him that doth the injury, then
 no offences are so great as those that are committed
 by men against God, no affronts like to those which
 are offered to the divine majesty by the continual pro-
 vocations of his creatures. And is not this an ar-
 gument of God's patience, that the glorious majes-
 ty of heaven should bear such multiplied indignities
 from such vile worms? that he who is the former of
 all things, should endure his own creatures to rebel
 against him, and the work of his hands to strike at
 him? that he who is our great benefactor should put
 up such affronts from those who depend upon his
 bounty, and are maintained at his charge? that he,
 in whose hands our breath is, should suffer men to
 breathe out oaths, and curses, and blasphemies against
 him? Surely these prove the patience of God to pur-
 pose, and are equally trials and arguments of it.

2. The patience of God will farther appear, if we consider how, notwithstanding all this, God deals with us. He is patient to the whole world, in that he doth not turn us out of being, and “turn the wicked together into hell, with all the nations that forget God.” He is patient to the greatest part of mankind, in that he makes but a few terrible examples of his justice, “that others may hear and fear, and take warning by them.” He is patient to particular persons, in that, notwithstanding our daily provocations, he prevents us daily with the blessing of his goodness, prolonging our lives, and vouchsafing so many favours to us, that, by this great goodness, we may be led to repentance.

But the patience of God will more illustriously appear, if we consider these following particulars, which are so many evidences and instances of it.

1. That God is not obliged to spare and forbear us at all. It is patience, that he doth not surprize us in the very act of sin, and let fly at us with a thunder-bolt so soon as ever we have offended; that the wrath of God doth not fall upon the intemperate person, as it did upon the Israelites, “whilst the meat and drink is yet in their mouths;” that a man is not struck dead or mad whilst he is telling a lie; that the soul of the profane and false swearer does not expire with his oaths and perjuries.

2. That God spares us, when it is in his power so easily to ruin us; when he can with one word command us out of being, and, by cutting asunder one little thread, let us drop into hell. If God were disposed to severity, he could deal with us after another manner; and as the expression is in the prophet, “ease himself of his adversaries, and be avenged of his enemies.”

3. That

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3. That God exerciseth this patience to sinners, *flagrante bello*, while they are up in arms against him, and committing hostilities upon him; he bears with us, even when we are challenging his justice to punish us, and provoking his power to destroy us.

4. That he is so very slow and unwilling to punish, and to inflict his judgments upon us. As for eternal punishments, God defers them a long while, and by all proper ways and means endeavours to prevent them, and to bring us to repentance. And as for those temporal judgments which God inflicts upon sinners, he carries himself so, that we may plainly see all the signs of unwillingness that can be; he tries to prevent them; he is loth to set about this work; and when he does, it is with much reluctance; and then he is easily persuaded and prevailed withal not to do it; and when he does, he does it not rigorously, and to extremity; and he is soon taken off, after he is engaged in it. All which are great instances and evidences of his wonderful patience to sinners.

(1.) God's unwillingness to punish appears, in that he labours to prevent punishment; and that he may effectually do this, he endeavours to prevent sin, the meritorious cause of God's judgments. To this end, he hath threatened it with severe punishments, that the dread of them may make us afraid to offend; and if this will not do, he does not yet give us over, but gives us a space of repentance, and invites us earnestly to turn to him, and thereby to prevent his judgments; he expostulates with sinners, and reasons the case with them, as if he were more concerned not to punish, than they are not to be punished: and thus, by his earnest desire of our repentance, he shews how little he desires our ruin.

(2.) He is long before he goes about this work.

Judg-

Judgment is, in scripture, called "his strange work;" as if he were not acquainted with it, and hardly knew how to go about it on the sudden. He is represented as not prepared for such a work, Deut. xxxii. 41. "If I whet my glittering sword:" as if the instruments of punishment were not ready for us. Nay by a strange kind of condescension to our capacities, and to set forth to us the patience of God, and his slowness to wrath, after the manner of men, he is represented as keeping out of the way, that he may not be tempted to destroy us; Exod. xxxiii. 2, 3. where he tells Moses, that "he would send an angel before them; for I will not go up in the midst of thee, lest I consume thee in the way."

At works of mercy he is very ready and forward. When Daniel prayed for the deliverance of the people of Israel out of captivity, the angel tells him, that, "at the beginning of his supplication, the commandment came forth," to bring him a promise of their deliverance. The mercy of God, many times, prevents our prayers, and outruns our wishes and desires: but when he comes to affliction, he takes time to do it; he passeth by many provocations, and waits long in expectation, that, by our repentance, we will prevent his judgments; "he hearkened and heard, (saith God in the prophet Jeremiah) "but they spake not right: no man repented him of his wickedness, saying, what have I done?" He is represented as waiting and listening, to hear if any penitent word would drop from them; he gives the sinner time to repent and reflect upon his actions, and to consider what he hath done, and space to reason himself into repentance. For this reason the judgments of God do often follow the sins of men at a great distance, otherwise he could easily
make

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"moment."

(3.) When he goes about this work, he does it with much reluctance: Hosea xi. 8. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? mine heart is turned within me, and my repentings are kindled together." He is represented as making many essays and offers before he came to it: Psal. cvi. 26. "Many a time lifted he up his hand in the wilderness to destroy them." He made as if he would do it, and let fall his hand again, as if he could not find in his heart to be so severe. God withholds his judgments till he is weary of holding in, as the expression is Jer. vi. 11. till he can forbear no longer; Jer. xlv. 22. "So that the LORD could no longer bear, because of the evil of your doings, and because of the abominations which ye have committed."

(4.) God is easily prevailed upon not to punish. When he seemed resolved upon it, to destroy the murmuring Israelites, yet how often, at the intercession of Moses, did he turn away his wrath? That he will accept of very low terms to spare a very wicked people, appears by the instance of Sodom, where, if there had been but ten righteous persons, he would not have destroyed them for the ten's sake. Yea, when his truth seemed to have been pawned, (at least in the apprehension of his prophet) yet even then repentance took him off, as in the case of Nineveh. Nay, how glad is he to be thus prevented! with what joy does he tell the prophet the news of Ahab's humiliation! "Seest thou how Ahab humbleth himself? Because he humbleth himself, I will not bring the evil in his days."

(5.) When he punisheth, he does it very seldom
rigor

rigorously, and to extremity, not so much as we deserve; Psal. ciii. 10. "He hath not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities," nor so much as he can. He doth not let loose the fierceness of his anger, nor pour forth all his wrath. Psal. lxxviii. 38. "being full of compassion, he forgave their iniquity, and destroyed them not; yea, many a time turned he his anger away, and did not stir up all his wrath."

(6.) After he hath begun to punish, and is engaged in the work, he is not hard to be taken off. There is a famous instance of this, 2 Sam. xxiv. when God had sent three days pestilence upon Israel, for David's sin in numbering the people, and, at the end of the third day, the angel of the LORD had stretched forth his hand over Jerusalem, to destroy it; upon the prayer of David, it is said, that "the LORD repented of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough; stay now thine hand." Nay, so ready is God to be taken off from this work, that he sets a high value upon those who stand in the gap to turn away his wrath; Numb. xxv. 11, 12, 13. "Phinehas the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, hath turned my wrath away from the children of Israel (while he was zealous for my sake among them) that I consumed not the children of Israel in my jealousy. Wherefore say, Behold, I give unto him my covenant of peace. And he shall have it, and his seed after him even the covenant of an everlasting priesthood; because he was zealous for his God, and made an atonement for the children of Israel." That which God values in this action of Phinehas, next to his zeal for him, is, that "he turned away his wrath, and made an atonement for the children of Israel."

5. And lastly, The patience of God will yet appear with farther advantage, if we consider some eminent and remarkable instances of it; which are so much the more considerable, because they are instances not only of God's patience extended to a long time, but to a great many persons. The long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah upon the whole world, as is probably conjectured, for the space of an hundred and twenty years. God bore with the people of Israel in the wilderness, after they had tempted him ten times, for the space of forty years; Acts xiii. 18. "And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness." And this instance of God's patience will be the more remarkable, if we compare it with the great impatience of that people; if they did but want flesh or water, they were out of patience with God: when Moses was in the mount with God but forty days, they presently fall to make new gods; they had not the patience of forty days, and yet God bore their manners forty years. God had spared Nineveh for some ages; and when his patience was even expired, and he seems to have past a final sentence upon it, yet he grants a reprieve for forty days, that they might sue out their pardon in that time; and they did so; "they turned from their evil ways," and God turned from the evil he said he would do "them, and he did it not."

But the most remarkable instance of God's long-suffering is to the Jews, if we consider it with all the circumstances of it; after they had rejected the Son of God, notwithstanding the purity of his doctrine, and the power of his miracles; after they had unjustly condemned, and cruelly "murdered the Lord of life," yet the patience of God respited the ruin of that people forty years.

Besides

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Besides all these, there are many instances of God's patience to particular persons: but it were endless to enumerate these; every one of us may be an instance to our selves of God's long-suffering.

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I shall only add, as a farther advantage to set off the patience of God to sinners, that his forbearance is so great, that he hath been complained of for it by his own servants. Job, who was so patient a man himself, thought much at it; Job xxi. 7, 8. "Wherefore do the wicked live, become old, yea, are mighty in power? Their seed is established in their sight with them, and their offspring before their eyes." Jonah challengeth God for it, chap. iv. 2. "Was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? and therefore I fled before unto Tarshish; for I know that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, &c." Jonah had observed God to be so prone to this, that he was loth to be sent upon his message, lest God should discredit his prophet, in not being so good (shall I say) so severe as his word.

I have done with the first thing I proposed to speak to, viz. The great patience and long-suffering of God to mankind.

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The patience of God.

2 P E T. iii. 9.

The LORD is not slack concerning his promise, (as some men count slackness) but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

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I Have made entrance into these words; in the handling of which, I proposed to do these three things.

First, to consider the patience and long-suffering of God, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature; "God is long-suffering to us-ward."

Secondly, to shew, that the patience of God, and the delay of his judgment, is no just ground why sinners should hope for impunity; "God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness."

Thirdly, to consider the true reason of God's patience and long-suffering towards mankind; "He is long-suffering to us-ward; not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." I have already spoken to the

First of these, namely, the patience and long-suffering of God, as it is an attribute and perfection of the divine nature. I proceed now to the

Second thing I proposed, namely, to shew, that the patience of God, and the delay of judgment, is no

no

no just ground why sinners should hope for impunity; "God is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness;" that is, as the scoffers, here mentioned by the apostle, did ignorantly and maliciously reason, that because our LORD delayed his coming to judgment so long, therefore he would never come.

There was, indeed, some pretence for this objection, because the Christians did generally apprehend that the day of judgment was very near, and that it would immediately follow the destruction of Jerusalem; and it seems, the disciples themselves were of that persuasion before our SAVIOUR'S death; when our SAVIOUR discoursing to them of the destruction of the temple, they put these two questions to him, Matt. xxiv. 3. "And as he sat upon the mount of Olives, the disciples came unto him privately, saying, Tell us when shall these things be? and what shall be the sign of thy coming, and of the end of the world? When shall these things be?" that is, the things he had been speaking of immediately before, viz. the destruction of Jerusalem, and the dissolution of the temple; that is plainly the meaning of the first question; to which they subjoined another, "And what shall be the sign of thy coming?" that is, to judgment, "and of the end of the world?" which, in all probability, was added to the former, because they supposed that the one was presently to follow the other, and therefore the same answer would serve them both: and it appears by our SAVIOUR'S answer, that he was not concerned to rectify them in this mistake, which might be of good use to them, both to make them more zealous to propagate the gospel, since there was like to be so little time for it; and

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and likewise to wean their affections from this world which they thought to be so near an end.

One thing, indeed, our SAVIOUR says, which (had they not been prepossessed with another opinion) does sufficiently intimate, that there might be considerable space of time betwixt the destruction of Jerusalem and the day of judgment; and this we find only in St. Luke, chap. xxi. 24. where, speaking of the miseries and calamities that should come upon the Jews, he says, "They shall fall by the edge of the sword, and be carried into captivity into all nations; and Jerusalem shall be trodden down of the Gentiles, until the time of the Gentiles be fulfilled." So that here were a great many events foretold, betwixt the destruction of Jerusalem and the end of the world, the accomplishment whereof might take up a great deal of time, as appears by the event of things; Jerusalem being at this day still trodden down by the Gentiles, and the Jews still continuing dispersed over the world: but the disciples it seems, did not much mind this, being carried away with a prejudicate conceit, that the end of the world would happen before the end of that age; in which they were much confirmed by what our SAVIOUR, after his resurrection, said of St. John, upon occasion of Peter's question concerning him; John xxi. 21, 22. "LORD, what shall this man do?" JESUS saith unto him, if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" Upon which words of our SAVIOUR concerning him, St. John himself adds, ver. 23. "Then went this saying abroad among the brethren, that that disciple should not die;" that is, that he should live till the coming of our LORD, and then be taken up with him into heaven; from all which they probably (as they thought)

thought) concluded, that the day of judgment would happen before the end of that age, whilst St. John was alive : but St. John, who writ last of all the evangelists (as Eusebius tells us) and lived till after the destruction of Jerusalem, as he acquaints us with this mistake, which was current among the Christians, so he takes care to rectify it, telling us, that “ JESUS said not, he should not die ; but if I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee ? ” He tells us, that our SAVIOUR did not affirm that he should not die ; but, to repress St. Peter’s curiosity, he says, “ If it were my pleasure that he should not die at all, but live till I come to judgment, what is that to thee ? ” And St. Peter likewise (or whoever was the author of this second epistle, or at least of this third chapter, which seems to be a new epistle by itself) takes notice of this mistake, about the nearness of the day of judgment, as that which gave occasion to these scoffers to deride the expectation of a future judgment among the Christians, because they had been already deceived about the time of it ; and thus the scoffers twitted them with in that question, “ Where is the promise of his coming ? ” Therefore the learned Grotius conjectures very probably, that this last epistle (contained in the third chapter) was written after the destruction of Jerusalem, which was the time fixed for CHRIST’S coming to judgment, and therefore there could be no ground for this scoff till after that time. St. Peter, indeed, did not live so long ; and therefore Grotius thinks that this epistle was writ by Simeon, or Simon, who was successor of St. James in the bishoprick of Jerusalem, and lived to the time of Trajan.

I have been the longer in giving an account of this, that we might understand where the ground and force

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force of this scoff lay ; namely in this, that because the Christians had generally been very confident, that the coming of CHRIST to judgment would be presently after the destruction of Jerusalem, and were now found to be deceived in that, therefore there was no regard to be had at all to their expectation of a future judgment ; because they might be deceived in that, as well as in the other.

But herein they argued very falsely, because our SAVIOUR had positively and peremptorily foretold his coming to judgment, but had never fixed and determined the time of it : nay, so far was he from that, that he had plainly told his disciples that the precise time of the day of judgment God had reserved as a secret to himself, which he had not imparted to any, no, not to the angels in heaven, nor to the Son himself ; Mark xiii. 32, 33. “ But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father. Take ye heed, watch and pray ; for ye know not when the time is.” So that if they presumed to make any conjectures about the time when the day of judgment would be, they did it without any warrant from our LORD : it was great presumption in them to determine the time of it, when our SAVIOUR had so expressly told them that the Father had reserved this as a secret, which he had never communicated to any, ; and therefore if they were mistaken about it, it was no wonder. But their mistake in this, was no prejudice to the truth of our SAVIOUR’s clear prediction of a future judgment, without any determination of the time of it, for that might be at some thousands of years distance, and yet be certain for all that ; and the delay of it was no sign of the uncertainty of our SAVIOUR’s prediction.

tion concerning it, but only of God's great patience and long-suffering to sinners, in expectation of their repentance; "God is not slack concerning his pro-

mise, as some men count slackness, but is long-suffering to us-ward." And this brings me to the

Third and last particular in the text, namely, the true reason of God's patience and long-suffering to mankind; "he is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." And for this St. Peter cites

St. Paul, ver. 15th of this chapter; "And account that the long-suffering of the LORD is salvation;" that is, that the great end and design of God's goodness and long-suffering to sinners, is, that they may repent, and be saved: "Account that the long-suffering of our LORD is salvation, even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given unto him, hath written unto you."

Now the words are not expressly found in St. Paul's writings: but the sense and effect of them is, viz. in Rom. ii. 4. "Despiseest thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?" God hath a very gracious and merciful design in his patience to sinners: he is good, that he may make us so, and that "his goodness may lead us to repentance." He defers punishment on purpose, that he may give men time to bethink themselves, and to return to a better mind: "he winks at the sins of men, that they may repent," says the son of Sirach. The patience of God aims at the cure and recovery of those who are not desperately and resolutely wicked.

This is the primary end and intention of God's patience to sinners; and if he fail of this end, through

our hardness and impenitency, he hath other ends which he will infallibly attain: he will hereby glorify the riches of his mercy, and vindicate the righteousness of his justice: the damned in hell shall acknowledge, that the patience of God was great mercy and goodness to them, though they abused it; for God does not lose the glory of his patience, though we lose the benefit of it, and he will make it subservient to his justice one way or other. Those great offenders whom he spares, after there are no hopes of their amendment, he, many times, makes use of, as instruments for the punishing of others, as "rods of his wrath, for the discipline of the world;" and he often reserves those who are incorrigibly bad for a more remarkable ruin. But, however, they are reserved to the judgment of the great day;" and if, after God hath exercised much patience towards sinners in this world, he inflicts punishment on them in the next, it must be acknowledged to be most just; for what can he do less, than to condemn those who would not be saved, and to make them miserable who so obstinately refused to be happy?

Before I come to apply this discourse concerning the patience and long-suffering of God to sinners, I must remove an objection or two:

I. The severity of God to some sinners in this life, and to all impenitent sinners in the next, seems to contradict what hath been said concerning God's patience and long-suffering.

As for the severity of God towards impenitent sinners in the next life, this doth not at all contradict the patience of God; because the very nature of patience, and forbearance, and long-suffering, does suppose a determinate time, and that they will not last always: this life is the day of God's patience, and

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and in the next world his justice and severity will take place: and therefore the punishment of sinners in another world, after God hath tried them in this, and expected their repentance, is no ways contrary to his patience and goodness, and very agreeable to his wisdom and justice; for it is no part of goodness, to see itself perpetually abused; it is not patience, but stupidity and insensibleness, to endure to be always trampled upon, and to bear to have his holy and just laws for ever despised and contemned.

And as for his severity to some sinners in this life; as to Lot's wife, to the Israelite that gathered sticks on the sabbath-day, to Nadab and Abihu, to Uzzah, to Ananias and Sapphira, and to Herod Agrippa; in all which instances God seems to have made quick work, and to have executed judgment speedily: to these I answer, That this severity of God to some few, doth rather magnify his patience to the rest of mankind; he may be severe to some few, for example and warning to many, that they may learn to make better use of his patience, and not to trespass so boldly upon it; and, perhaps, he hath exercised much patience already towards those to whom at last he is so severe; as is plain in the case of Herod, and it may well be supposed in most of the other instances; or else the sin so suddenly and severely punished, was very heinous and presumptuous, of a contagious and spreading nature, and of dangerous example. Lot's wife sinned most presumptuously against an express and an easy command, and whilst God was taking care of her deliverance in a very extraordinary manner. That of Nadab and Abihu, and of the man that gathered sticks on the sabbath-day, were presently after the giving of the law, in which case great severity is necessary; and that of Ananias and

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Sapphira, at the first publishing of the gospel, that the majesty of the divine Spirit, and the authority of the first publishers of it, might not be contemned. That of Uzzah was upon the return of the ark of God from among the Philistines, that the people might not lose their reverence for it, after it had been taken captive. So that these necessary severities to a few, in comparison of those many that are warned by them, are rather arguments of God's patience than objections against it.

II. It is objected, That if God do not desire the ruin of sinners, but their repentance, whence comes it to pass that all are not brought to repentance for who hath resisted his will? To this I answer,

1. That there is no doubt but God is able to do this. He can, if he pleaseth, conquer and reclaim the most obstinate spirits; he is able out of "stones" "to raise up children unto Abraham." And sometimes he exerts his omnipotence herein, as in the conversion of St. Paul, in a kind of violent and irresistible manner: but he hath nowhere declared that he will do this to all; and we see plainly, in experience, that he does not do it.

2. God may very well be said, "not to be willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance," when he does, on his part, what is sufficient to that end; and upon this ground the scripture every where represents God as desiring the repentance of sinners, and their obedience to his laws: Deut. v. 29, "O that there were such a heart in them, that they would fear me, and keep all my commandments always, that it might be well with them!" So Jer. xiii. 27. "O Jerusalem, wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?" If. v. 3, 4. we find God there solemnly appeal-

appealing to the people of Israel, whether there had been any thing wanting on his part that was fit to be done ; “ And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard: what could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it? wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?” God may justly look for the fruits of repentance and obedience from those to whom he affords a sufficiency of means to that end. And if so, then,

3. The true reason why men do not repent, but perish, is because they are obstinate, and will not repent: and this account the scripture every where gives of the impenitency of men, and the ruin consequent upon it. Psal. lxxxi. 13. “ O that my people had hearkened unto me, and Israel had walked in my ways ! But my people would not hearken to my voice, and Israel would none of me.” Ezek. xxxiii. 11. “ Why will ye die, O house of Israel?” Prov. i. 29, 30, 31. “ That they hated knowledge, and did not chuse the fear of the LORD. They would none of my counsel ; they despised all my reproof. Therefore they shall eat of the fruit of their own ways, and be filled with their own devices.” The ruin of sinners doth not proceed from the counsel of God, but from their own choice. And so likewise our SAVIOUR every where chargeth the ruin and destruction of the Jews upon their own wilful obstinacy.

The inferences from this discourse, concerning the patience and long-suffering of God towards mankind, shall be these three.

I. To stir us up to a thankful acknowledgment of the great patience of God towards us, notwithstanding

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appealing to the people of Israel, whether there had been any thing wanting on his part that was fit to be done; "And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem, and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard: what could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done to it? wherefore when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes?" God may justly look for the fruits of repentance and obedience from those to whom he affords a sufficiency of means to that end. And if so, then,

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The inferences from this discourse, concerning the patience and long-suffering of God towards mankind, shall be these three.

I. To stir us up to a thankful acknowledgment of the great patience of God towards us, notwithstanding

ing our manifold and heinous provocations. We may every one of us take to our selves those words, Lam. iii. 22. "It is of the LORD's mercy that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." They are "renewed every morning." Whenever we sin (and "we provoke God every day") it is of his "patience that we are not destroyed:" and when we sin again, this is a new and greater instance of God's patience. The mercies of God's patience are no more to be numbered than our sins: we may say with David, "How great is the sum of them?" The goodness of God in sparing us, is, in some respect, greater than his goodness in creating us; because he had no provocation not to make us, but we provoke him daily to destroy us.

II. Let us propound the patience of God for a pattern to our selves. Plutarch says, "That God sets forth himself in the midst of the world for our imitation, and propounds to us the example of his patience, to teach us not to revenge injuries hastily upon one another."

III. Let us comply with the design of God's patience and long-suffering towards us, which is "to bring us to repentance." Men are very apt to abuse it to a quite contrary purpose, to the encouraging themselves in their evil ways. So Solomon observes, Eccl. viii. 11. "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil:" But this is very false reasoning; for the patience of God is an enemy to sin, as well as his justice; and the design of it is not to countenance sin, but to convert the sinner: Rom. ii. 4. "Despise thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering? not knowing that:

"the

“ the goodness of GOD leadeth thee to repentance ?” Patience in GOD should produce repentance in us ;

and we should look upon it as an opportunity given us by GOD to repent and be saved ; 2 Pet. iii. 15.

“ Account that the long-suffering of GOD is salvation.” They that do not improve the patience of GOD to their own salvation, mistake the true meaning and intent of it. But many are so far from making this use of it, that they presume upon it, and sin with more courage and confidence because of it : but that we may be sensible of the danger of this, I will offer these two or three considerations ;

1. That nothing is more provoking to GOD, than the abuse of his patience. GOD’s patience waits for our repentance ; and all long attendance, even of inferiors upon their superiors, hath something in it that is grievous : how much more grievous and provoking must it be to the great GOD, after he hath laid out upon us all the riches of his goodness and long-suffering, to have that despised ? after his patience hath waited a long time upon us, not only to be thrust away with contempt, but to have that which should be an argument to us to leave our sins, abused into an encouragement to continue in them ? GOD takes an account of all the days of his patience and forbearance ; Luke xiii. 7. “ Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none : cut it down ; why cumbereth it the ground ?”

2. Consider that the patience of GOD will have an end. Though GOD suffers long, he will not suffer always ; we may provoke GOD so long, till he can forbear no longer without injury and dishonour to his wisdom, and justice, and holiness ; and GOD will not suffer one attribute to wrong the rest : his wisdom will determine the length of his patience ; and when

when his patience is to no purpose, when there is no hopes of our amendment, his wisdom will then put a period to it; then the patience of his mercy will determine. "How often would I have gathered you, and you would not? therefore your house is left unto you desolate." And the patience of God's judgments will then determine; "Why should they be smitten any more? they will revolt more and more." Yea, patience itself, after a long and fruitless expectation, will expire. A sinner may continue so long impenitent, till the patience of God, as I may say, grows impenitent, and then our ruin will make haste, and destruction "will come upon us in a moment." If men will not come to repentance, "the day of the LORD will come as a thief in the night," as it follows in the next verse after the text; the judgment of God will suddenly surprize those who will not be gained by his patience.

3. Consider that nothing will more hasten and aggravate our ruin, than the abuse of God's patience. All this time of God's patience, his wrath is coming towards us; and the more we presume upon it, the sooner it will overtake us; Luke xii. 46. The wicked servant, who said his LORD delayed his coming, and fell to rioting and drunkenness, our SAVIOUR tells us, "that the lord of that servant will come in a day when he looks not for him."

And it will aggravate our ruin; the longer punishment is a coming, the heavier it will be: those things which are long in preparation, are terrible in execution; the weight of God's wrath will make amends for the slowness of it; and the delay of judgment will be fully recompensed in the dreadfulnes of it when it comes.

Let

Let all those consider this who go on in their sin, and are deaf to the voice of God's patience, which calls upon them every moment of their lives. There is a day of vengeance a coming upon those who trifle away this day of God's patience; nothing will sooner and more inflame the wrath and displeasure of God against us, than his abused patience, and the despised riches of his goodness. As oil, though it be soft and smooth, yet, when it is once inflamed, burns most fiercely; so the patience of God, when it is abused, turns into fury; and his mildest attributes into the greatest severities.

And if the patience of God do not bring us to repentance, it will but prepare us for a more intolerable ruin: after God hath kept a long indignation in his breast, it will, at length, break forth with the greater violence. The patience of God encreaseth his judgments by an incredible kind of proportion; Levit. xxvi. 18. "And if you will still (says God to the people of Israel) "walk contrary to me, and if "ye will not be reformed by all these things, I will "punish you yet seven times more." And ver. 28. "I will bring seven times more plagues upon you, "according to your sins." At first God's justice accuseth sinners; but, after a long time of patience, his mercy comes in against us, and, instead of staying his hand, adds weight to his blows; Rom. ix. 22. "What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and "to make his power known, endured with much "long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction?" They upon whom the patience of God hath no good effect, are "vessels of wrath, prepared and fitted for destruction." If ever God display his wrath, and make his anger known, he will do it in the most severe manner upon those who

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have despised and abused his patience ; for these, in a more peculiar manner, “ do treasure up for themselves wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.”

To conclude : let us all take a review of our lives, and consider how long the patience of God hath waited upon us, and borne with us ; with some, twenty, forty, perhaps sixty years, and longer. Do we not remember how God spared us in such a danger, when we gave ourselves for lost ? And how he recovered us in such a sickness, when the physician gave us up for gone ? And what use have we made of this patience and long-suffering of God towards us ? It is the worst temper in the world, not to be melted by kindness, not to be obliged by benefits, not to be tamed by gentle usage. He that is not wrought upon, neither by the patience of his mercy, nor by the patience of his judgments, his case is desperate, and past remedy. “ Consider this, “ all ye that forget God,” lest his patience turn into fury ; for “ God is not slack, as some men count slackness ; but long-suffering to sinners, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

S E R M O N C L.

The long-suffering of God.

E C C L E S. viii. ii.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

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NOTHING is more evident, than that the world lies in wickedness, and that iniquity every where abounds; and yet nothing is more certain, than that God will not acquit the guilty, and let sin go unpunished. All men, excepting those who have offered notorious violence to the light of their own minds, and have put the candle of the LORD, which is in them, under a bushel, do believe that there is a God in the world, to whose holy nature and will sin is perfectly contrary, "who loves righteousness and hates iniquity," that "his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings;" that "there is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves." All men, except those whose consciences are seared, as it were, with an hot iron, are convinced of the difference of good and evil, and that it is not all one whether men serve God or serve him not, do well, or live wickedly. Every man, from his inward sense and experience, is satisfied of his own liberty, and that God lays upon men no necessity of sinning, but that whenever we do amiss, it is our own act, and we chuse to do so; and so far is

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he from giving the least countenance to sin, that he hath given all imaginable discouragement to it, by the most severe and terrible threatenings, such as one would think sufficient to deter men for ever from it, and to drive it out of the world; and to make his threatenings the more awful and effectual, his providence hath not been wanting to give remarkable instances of his justice and severity upon notorious offenders, even in this life; and yet, for all this, men do, and will sin; nay, they are zealously set and bent upon it.

Now here is the wonder; what it is that gives sinners such heart, and makes them so resolute and undaunted in so dangerous a course. Solomon gives us this account of it; because the punishments and judgments of God follow the sins of men so slowly, and are long before they overtake the sinner. “Because cause sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the hearts of the sons of men are fully set in them to do evil.”

The scope of the wise man’s discourse is this; that by reason of God’s forbearance and long-suffering towards sinners in this life, it is not so easy to discern the difference between them and other men; this life is the day of God’s patience, but the next will be a day of retribution and recompence. Now because God doth defer and moderate the punishment of sinners in this world, and reserve the weight of his judgments to the next; because, through the long-suffering of God, many great sinners live and die without any remarkable testimony of God’s wrath and displeasure against them, “therefore the hearts of the children of men are fully set in them to do evil.”

• If we render the text word for word from the original,

ginal, it runs thus ; “ Because nothing is done as a
“ recompence to an evil work, therefore the hearts
“ of the sons of men are full in them to do evil ;”
that is, because men are not opposed, and contra-
dicted in their evil ways, because divine justice doth
not presently check and control sinners, because
sentence is not immediately past upon them, and
judgment executed, therefore the heart of the sons
of men is full in them to do evil ; that is, therefore
men grow bold and presumptuous in sin ; for the
Hebrew word which we render, “ is fully set in
“ them,” we find Esth. vii. 5. where Ahasuerus
says concerning Haman, “ Who is he? and where
“ is he that durst presume in his heart to do so?
“ whose heart was full to do so,” *Fervet in iis cor
filiorum hominum* ; so some render it, “ the hearts
“ of men boil with wickedness,” are so full of it,
that it works over. Men are resolute in an evil
course, “ their hearts are strengthened and hardened
“ in them to do evil,” so others translate the words.
The translation of the LXX is very emphatical, ἐ-
πληροφορήθη καρδία, “ the heart of the sons of men
“ is fully persuaded and assured to do evil.” All
these translations agree in the main scope and sense,
viz. That sinners are very apt to presume upon the
long-suffering of God, and to abuse it, to the har-
dening and encouraging of themselves in their evil
ways. In the handling of this, I shall

First, briefly shew that it is so.

Secondly, whence this comes to pass, and upon
what pretences and colours of reason, men encourage
themselves in sin, from the patience of God.

Thirdly, I shall endeavour to answer an objection
about this matter.

First, that men are very apt to abuse the long-
suffering

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suffering of God, to the encouraging and hardening of themselves in an evil course, the experience of the world, in all ages, does give abundant testimony. Thus it was with the old world, "when the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while he was preparing an ark, for the space of an hundred and twenty years," 1 Pet. iii. 20. For the wickedness of man, which was great upon the earth, a general deluge was threatened; but God was patient, and delayed his judgment a great while: hereupon they grew secure in their impenitency, and went on in their course, as if they had no apprehension of danger, no fear of the judgment threatened. So our SAVIOUR tells us, Matth. xxiv. 38, 39. "As in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away." And so it was with Sodom, Luke xvii. 28. And likewise also as it was in the days of Lot, they eat, they drank, they bought, they sold, they planted, they built." And so, our SAVIOUR tells us, it will be in the end of the world; "Even thus shall it be in the day when the son of man is revealed." So likewise the apostle St. Paul, Rom. ii. 4, 5. "Despise thou the riches of his goodness, and forbearance, and long-suffering, not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance? But after thy hardness and impenitent heart, treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God." The goodness and long-suffering of God, which ought in all reason to lead men to repentance, is to many an occasion of greater hardness and impenitency. So also St. Peter fore-

tels,

els, 2 Pet. iii. 3. "that in the last days there should come scoffers, who should walk after their own hearts lusts, saying, where is the promise of his coming?" And we see, in daily experience, that the greatest part of sinners grow more obstinate and confirmed in their wicked ways, upon account of God's patience, and because he delays the punishment due to them for their sins. Let us consider, in the

Second place, whence this comes to pass, and upon what pretence and colour of reason men encourage themselves in sin, from the long-suffering of God. And there is no doubt but this proceeds from our ignorance and inconsiderateness, and from an evil heart of unbelief, from the temptation and suggestion of the devil, one of whose great arts it is, to make men question the threatenings of God, and to insinuate, as he did to our first parents, either that he hath not denounced such threatenings, or that he will not execute them so severely. All these causes do concur to the producing this monstrous effect; but that which I design to inquire into, is from what pretence of reason, grounded upon the long-suffering of God, sinners argue themselves into this confidence and presumption. For when the wise man saith, that "because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil," he does not intend to insinuate, that God's long-suffering fills the hearts of men with wicked designs and resolutions, and does, by a proper and direct efficacy, harden sinners in their course; but that wicked men, upon some account or other, do take occasion, from the long-suffering of God, to harden themselves in sin; they draw false conclusions from it to

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to impose upon themselves, as if it were really a ground of encouragement; they think they see some thing in the forbearance of God, and his delay of punishment, which makes them hope for impunity in an evil course, notwithstanding the threatenings of God.

And therefore I shall endeavour to shew, what those false conclusions are, which wicked men draw from the delay of punishment, and to discover the sophistry and fallacy of them: and I shall rank them under two heads; those which are more gross and atheistical, and those which are not so gross, but yet more common and frequent.

I. Those conclusions which are more gross and atheistical, which bad men draw to the hardening and encouraging of themselves in sin, from the delay of punishment, (which we, who believe a God, call the patience or long-suffering of God) are these three; either that there is no God; or if there be, that there is no providence; or that there is no difference between good and evil.

I shall speak more briefly of these, because I hope there are but few in the world of such irregular and besotted understandings, as to make such inferences as these from the delay of punishment.

1st. From hence some would fain conclude, that there is no God. That some are so absurd as to reason in this manner, the scripture tells us, Psal. xiv.

1. "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God: they are corrupt, and have done abominable works." Now the argument that these men frame to themselves, is this; God doth not take a speedy course with sinners, and revenge himself immediately upon the workers of iniquity, therefore there is no God; for if there were, he would shew himself, and

and not bear the affronts of sinners, when it is so easy for him to vindicate himself by a swift and speedy vengeance. Thus the poet represents the atheist arguing; *Nullos esse deos, inane cælum, affirmat Selius, probatque, quod se factum, dum negat hoc, videt beatum.* "Selius affirms, there are no gods, and "that heaven is an empty place, and proves it, "because, whilst he denies God, he sees himself in a "very happy and prosperous condition."

And here it is worthy our notice, at what a contradictory rate these men reason. First, they would have no God, lest he should be just, and punish them as they deserved; and then, in another mood, they would have him to be nothing but justice and severity, lest there should be a God; as if no other notion could be framed of the divine nature, but of a rash fury, and impetuous revenge, and an impotent passion, which when it is offended and provoked, cannot contain itself, and forbear punishment for a moment. Justice is not such a perfection as doth necessarily exclude wisdom, and goodness, and patience; it doth in no wise contradict the perfection of the divine nature to bear with sinners, in expectation of their repentance and amendment; or if God foresees their final impenitency, to respite their punishment to the most fit and convenient season. God may suffer long, and yet be resolved, if sinners persist in the abuse of his goodness and patience, to execute vengeance upon them in due time. It is a pitiful ground of atheism, that because God is so much better than wicked men deserve, they will not allow him to be at all.

2dly, Others infer from the delay of punishment, that there is no providence that administers the affairs of the world, and regards the good and bad actions

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of men. For though the being of God be acknowledged, yet if he do not regard what is done here below, nor concern himself in human affairs, sinners are as safe and free to do what they please, as if there were no God; and upon this ground, the scripture tells us, many encourage themselves in their wickedness; Psal. lxiv. 5. "They encourage themselves in an evil matter, they commune of laying snares privily; they say, Who shall see them?" And more expressly, Psal. xciv. 4, 5, 6, 7. "How long shall they utter and speak hard things, and all the workers of iniquity boast themselves? They break in pieces thy people, O LORD, and afflict thine heritage. They slay the widow and the stranger, and murder the fatherless. Yet they say, The LORD shall not see, neither shall the God of Jacob regard it." And if this were so, well might they encourage themselves. If it were true which Epicurus saith, "That God takes no knowledge of the actions of men, that he is far removed from us; and contented with himself, and not at all concerned in what we do;" if this were true, the inference which Lucretius makes, were very just; *Quare religio pedibus subiecta vicissim obteritur*; "Men might trample religion under their feet, and live without any regard to the laws of it."

But let us see how they infer this from the long-suffering of God, that he neglects the affairs of the world, and hath no consideration of the actions of men, because they see the ungodly to prosper in the world, equally with others that are strictly devout and virtuous, yea, many times, to be in a more prosperous and flourishing condition; "they are not in trouble like other men, neither are they plagued like other men." So that if there be a God, it seems

(say

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(say they) that he connives at the crimes of men, and “ looks on upon them that deal treacherously, “ and holds his peace, whilst the wicked devoureth “ the man that is more righteous than himself :” as the prophet expresth it, Hab. i. 13.

For answer to this, I shall only give this reasonable and credible account of the long-suffering of God, and the impunity of wicked men in this life, which not only the scripture gives us, but the heathen were able to give from the light of nature, and is agreeable to the common sense of mankind ; namely, that this life is a state of probation and trial, wherein God “ suffers men to walk in their own ways” without any visible check and restraint, and does not usually inflict present and remarkable punishments upon them for their evil deeds ; because this being a state of trial of the dispositions and manners of men, is rather the proper season of patience, than of punishments and rewards ; and therefore it is very reasonable to suppose, that God reserves sinners for a solemn and publick trial at the great assizes of the world, when he will openly vindicate the honour of his justice upon the despisers of his patience and long-suffering, when he will make “ his judgment to break forth as the light, “ and his righteousness as the noon-day.” In the mean time the providence of God, when he sees it fit, gives some remarkable instances of his justice upon great and notorious offenders in this life, as a pledge and earnest of a future judgment ; and these sometimes more general, as in the destruction of the old world by an universal deluge, when “ he saw “ the wickedness of men to be great upon the earth.” And such was that terrible vengeance which was poured down upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and the

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cities about them ; which, as St. Jude tells us, “ are
 “ set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of e-

“ ternal fire,” that is, of a perpetual destruction by fire.

3dly, Another gross and atheistical inference, which
 men are apt to make from the delay of punishment,
 is, that there is no such difference of good and evil
 as is pretended ; because they do not see the good
 and bad actions of men differenced in their rewards,
 because divine justice doth not presently manifest it-
 self ; and “ every transgression and disobedience”
 doth not immediately “ receive a just recompence
 “ of reward,” therefore they cannot believe, that
 the difference between good and evil is so great
 and evident.

For answer to this : Not to insist upon the dif-
 ference which the providence of God sometimes
 makes between them in this life, I appeal to the
 consciences of men, whether they do not secretly
 and inwardly acknowledge a clear difference between
 good and evil. Are not the worst of men apt to
 conceive better hopes of success, when they are a-
 bout a just and honest undertaking, than when they
 are engaged in a wicked design ? Do not bad men
 feel a secret shame and horror, when no eye sees
 them, and the wickedness they are about to commit
 doth not fall under the cognizance and censure of any
 human court or tribunal ? Have they not many
 checks and rebukes in their own spirits, much distur-
 bance and confusion of mind, when they are enter-
 prising a wicked thing ? And does not this plainly
 argue, that they are guilty to themselves that they
 are about something which they ought not to do ?

It is very true, that most men are more sensible of
 the evil of an action, when they feel the ill effects
 and consequences of it, and suffer the punishment

that is due to it: but yet the sense of good and evil is so deeply imprest upon human nature, that I think no man, remaining a man, can quite deface and blot out the difference of good and evil. So that if men will but attend to the natural dictates and suggestions of their own minds, they cannot possibly infer, from the delay of punishment, that there is no difference of good and evil.

But because those who argue thus are but few, in comparison, there being not many in the world arrived to that degree of blindness, and height of impiety, as to disbelieve a God, and a providence; and I think none have attained to that perfect conquest of conscience, as to have lost all sense of good and evil; therefore I shall rather insist,

II. Upon those kind of reasonings which are more ordinary and common among bad men, and whereby they cheat themselves into everlasting perdition; and they are such as these:

1. Because sentence against an evil work is not speedily executed, therefore sin is not so great an evil.

2. Therefore God is not so highly offended and provoked by it. Or,

3. God is not so severe in his own nature, as he is commonly represented.

4. Therefore the punishment of sin is not so certain. Or, however,

5. It is at a distance, and may be prevented time enough, by a future repentance, in our old age, or at the hour of death; by some such false reasonings as these, which men think may probably be collected from the patience and long-suffering of God, they harden and encourage themselves in an evil course.

1. Because the punishment of sin is deferred, therefore they conclude it is not so great an evil; they

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they do not feel the ill effects of it at present; and things go well and prosperously with them, no less than with those who are so strict and conscientious and therefore they hope there is no such great evil in sin, as melancholy people are apt to fancy to themselves. For answer to this,

(1.) Consider seriously what sin is, and then thou wilt see reason enough to call it a great evil. To sin against God, is to condemn the greatest authority in the world, to contradict the greatest holiness and purity, to abuse the greatest goodness, and to provoke almighty justice to take vengeance upon thee and to make thee as miserable as thou art capable of being. To sin against God, is to be disobedient to thy sovereign, and unthankful to thy best benefactor, and to act contrary to the greatest obligations against thy best reason and truest interest; to disoblige thy kindest friend, and to gratify thy worst and bitterest enemy; it is to disorder thyself, to create perpetual disquiet to thy own mind, and to do the greatest mischief possible to thyself; to deprive thyself of the greatest happiness, and to draw down upon thyself extreme and eternal misery. And what do we call a great evil, if this be not, which contains in it all the kinds, and all the aggravations of evil that can be, and hath all the circumstances of ugliness and deformity in it that can be imagined?

(2.) Whatever sin be in itself, yet from hence we can in no wise conclude, that it is not a great evil, because the punishment of it is deferred for a while; from hence indeed it follows, that God is very good in deferring the punishment which is due to thee for thy sins, but by no means that sin is not very evil. The reprieve of a traitor does indeed argue the goodness and clemency of the prince, but doth not at all a-

of the heinousness of the crime for which he is sentenced. The great evil of sin is evident, because the holy and just God hath forbidden it, and declared his hatred and detestation of it, and threatened it with most severe and direful punishment; that God respites the punishment which is due to sin, and does not immediately take vengeance upon sinners, but affords them a space, and means, and opportunity of repentance: this doth not at all lessen the evil of sin, but is rather an aggravation of it; that we should offend and provoke that God, who is so patient and long-suffering towards us, so very loth to bring those evils upon us, which we are so rash and forward to pull down upon ourselves.

2. If God doth not immediately punish sin upon the commission of it, and instantly let fly at the sinner, this they would construe to be a sign that he is not so highly offended and provoked by it; if he were, he would manifest his displeasure against it, by the sudden and violent effusions of his wrath. For answer to this, I desire these two things may be considered:

(1.) That God himself, in his word, every where plainly declares to us his great displeasure against sin; Psal. v. 4, 5. "Thou art not a God that hast pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with thee. The foolish shall not stand in thy sight; thou hatest all the workers of iniquity. Thou art not a God that hast pleasure in wickedness." The words are a *μείωσις*, and less is spoken than is meant and intended, viz. That God is so far from taking pleasure in the sins of men, that he is highly displeased at them, and bears an implacable hatred against them.

And do not the terrible threatenings of God against sin

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fin declare him to be highly offended at it? When he says, that "he will come in flaming fire, to render vengeance to all them that know not the gospel of his Son;" and that they "shall be punished with everlasting destruction, from the presence of the LORD, and from the glory of his power." Can we think that all the threatenings of God's word, and all those direful curses which are written in his book shall return empty, without doing any execution upon thou that now flatterest thyself in vain and groundless hopes, that none of these evils shall come upon thee when thou comest to stand before the great Judge of the world, and to behold the killing frowns of his countenance, and to hear those bitter words of eternal displeasure from the mouth of God himself? "Depart, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels;" thou wilt then believe that God is heartily angry and offended with thee for thy sins. We shall find in that day, that the threatenings of God's word, which we now hear so securely, and without terror, had a full signification; or rather, that no words could convey to us the terror of them. What the scripture says of the happiness and glory of the next life, is true also of the misery and punishments of the other world, that "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, those terrible things which God hath reserved for the workers of iniquity."

But, above all, the direful sufferings of the Son of God, when sin was but imputed to him, are a demonstration of God's implacable hatred of sin; for that rather than sin should go unpunished, God was pleased to subject his own Son to the suffering due to it: this plainly shews, that he hated sin as much as he loved his own Son.

But

But, (2dly,) GOD may conceive a very great displeasure against sin, and be highly incensed and provoked by it, and yet suspend the effects of his displeasure, and defer the punishment of it for a great while: and to imagine otherwise, argues a gross mistake of the nature of GOD, arising from our not considering the attributes and perfections of GOD in conjunction and consistency with one another. When we consider one attribute of GOD singly, and separate it from the rest, and frame such wide and large apprehensions of it, as to exclude his other perfections, we have a false notion of GOD; and the reason of this mistake is, because, among men, an eminent degree of any one excellency doth commonly shut out others; because in our narrow and finite nature, many perfections cannot stand together; but it is quite otherwise in the divine nature. In infinite perfection, all perfections do meet and consist together; one perfection doth not hinder and exclude another, and therefore in our conceptions of GOD, we are to take great heed that we do not raise any one attribute or perfection of GOD upon the ruin of the rest.

So that it is a false imagination of GOD, when we so attribute justice or anger to him, as to exclude his patience and long-suffering: for GOD is not impotent in his anger, as we are; every thing that provokes him, doth not presently put him out of patience, so that he cannot contain his wrath, and forbear immediately to revenge himself upon sinners. In this sense GOD says of himself, Isa. xxvii. 4. "Fury is not in me." There is nothing of a rash and ungoverned passion in the wise and just GOD. Every sin indeed kindles his anger, and provokes his displeasure against us, and by our repeated and conti-

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nued offences, we still add fuel to his wrath; but it doth not of necessity instantly break forth like “a consuming fire, and a devouring flame.” The holy and righteous nature of God makes him necessarily offended and displeased with the sins of men; but as to the manifestation of his wrath, and the effects of his anger, his wisdom and goodness do regulate and determine the proper time and circumstances of punishment.

3. From the patience of God, and the delay of punishment, men are apt to conclude, that God is not so severe in his nature as he is commonly represented. It is true, he hath declared his displeasure against sin, and threatened it with dreadful punishments; which he may do, in great wisdom, to keep the world in awe and order: but great things are likewise spoken of his mercy, and of the wonderful delight he takes in the exercise of his mercy: so that notwithstanding all the threatenings which are denounced against sin, it is to be hoped, that when sentence comes to be past, and judgment to be executed, God will “remember mercy in the midst of judgment,” and that “mercy will triumph over judgment;” and that as now his patience stays his hand, and turns away his wrath, so at the last, the milder attributes of his goodness and mercy will interpose and moderate the rigour and severity of his justice; and of this his great patience and long-suffering towards sinners for the present seems to be some kind of pledge and earnest: he that is so slow to anger, and so loth to execute punishment, may probably be prevailed upon by his own pity and goodness to remit it at the last: and this is the more credible, because it is granted on all hands, that no person is obliged to execute his threatenings, as he is to
make

make good his promises ; he that promiseth passeth
a right to another ; but he that threateneth keeps
the right and power of doing what he pleaseth in
his own hands.

I shall speak a little more fully to this, because it
is almost incredible how much men bear up them-
selves upon vain and groundless hopes of the bound-
less mercy of God, and “ bless themselves in their
“ hearts, saying, They shall have peace, though
“ they walk in the imagination of their hearts,
“ to add drunkenness to thirst ;” that is, though
they still persist in their vices, and add one degree of
sin to another.

Now, for answer to this,

(1.) Let it be granted, that a bare threatening does
not necessarily infer the certainty of the event ; and
that the thing threatened shall infallibly come to pass ;
no person is obliged to perform his threatenings, as
he is his promises ; the threatenings of God declare
what sin deserves, and what the sinner may justly ex-
pect if he continue impenitent and incorrigible. But
then we are to take notice, that repentance is the on-
ly condition that is implied in the threatenings of
God, and will effectually hinder the execution of
them : Jer. xviii. 7, 8, 9, 10. “ At what instant
“ I speak (says God) concerning a nation, and con-
“ cerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull
“ down, and to destroy it ; if that nation against
“ whom I have pronounced, turn from their evil, I
“ will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto
“ them. And at what instant I shall speak con-
“ cerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to
“ build and to plant it ; if it do evil in my sight,
“ and obey not my voice, then will I repent of the
“ good wherewith I said I would benefit them.”

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Now if when God hath promised to do good to a people, sin will hinder the blessing promised, and bring down judgments upon them, much more when it is particularly threatened.

But as to the case of final impenitency and unbelief, God, that he might strengthen his threatenings, hath added a sign of immutability to them, having confirmed them with an oath; "I have sworn (saith the LORD) that they shall not enter into my rest": which, though it was spoken to the unbelieving Jews, the apostle to the Hebrews applies it to a final unbelief and impenitency under the gospel, of which the infidelity of the Israelites was a type and figure. Now though God may remit of his threatenings: yet his oath is a plain declaration that he will not; because it signifies the firm and immutable determination of his will, and thereby puts an end to all doubts and controversies concerning the fulfilling of his threatenings.

(2.) It is certainly much the wisest and safest way, to believe the threatenings of God, in the strictness and rigour of them, unless there be some tacit condition evidently implied in them; because if we do not believe them, and the thing prove otherwise, the consequence of our mistake is fatal and dreadful. It is true indeed, that God by his threatenings did intend to keep sinners in awe, and to deter them from sin: but if he had any where revealed, that he would not be rigorous in the execution of these threatenings, such a revelation would quite take off the edge and terror of them, and contradict the end and design of them; for threatenings signify very little, but upon this supposition, that in all probability they will be executed: and if this be true, it is the greatest madness and folly in the world to run the hazard of it.

(3.) As

(3.) As for those large declarations which the scripture makes of the boundless mercy of God to sinners, we are to limit them, as the scripture hath done, to the time and season of mercy, which is this life, and while we are in the way. This is the day of mercy and salvation ; and when this life is ended, the opportunities of grace and mercy are past, and the day of recompence and vengeance will begin. Now God tries us, and offers mercy to us ; but if we obstinately refuse it, judgment will take hold of us.

And then we must limit the mercy of God to the conditions upon which he offers it, which are, repentance for sins past, and sincere obedience for the future : but if men continue obstinate and impenitent, and encourage themselves in sin from the mercy and patience of God ; this is not a case that admits of mercy, but, on the contrary, his justice will triumph in the ruin and destruction of those who, instead of embracing the offers of his mercy, do despise and abuse them : “ He will laugh at their calamity, and mock when their fear comes ; when their fear comes as desolation, and their destruction as a whirl-wind ; when distress and anguish cometh upon them, then they may call upon him, but he will not answer ; they may seek him early, but they shall not find him. If we despise the riches of God’s goodness, and long-suffering, and forbearance,” he knows how to handle us, and will do it to purpose ; “ with the froward he will shew himself froward,” and will be in a more especial manner severe towards those who take encouragement from his mercy, to disbelieve and despise his threatenings. And this God hath as plainly told us, as words can express any thing, Deut. xxix. 19, 20. “ And if it come to pass that when he
“ heareth

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“ heareth the words of this curse, he bleſs himſelf
 “ in his heart, ſaying, I ſhall have peace, though I
 “ walk in the imagination of my heart, to add drunken-
 “ neſſes to thirſt : the LORD will not ſpare him,
 “ but then the anger of the LORD, and his jealousy,
 “ ſhall ſmoke againſt that man, and all the curſes
 “ that are written in this book, ſhall lye upon him,
 “ and the LORD ſhall blot out his name from under
 “ heaven.” Whatever right and power God hath
 reſerved to himſelf about the execution of his threaten-
 ings, he hath plainly declared, that, of all others,
 thoſe who encourage themſelves in a ſinful courſe,
 from the hopes of God’s mercy, notwithstanding his
 threatenings, ſhall find no favour and mercy at his
 hand : whatever he may remit of his threatenings to
 others, he will certainly not ſpare thoſe who believe
 ſo largely concerning the mercy of God, not with a
 mind to ſubmit to the terms of it, but to preſume
 ſo much the more upon it.

(4.) God hath not been wanting to ſhew ſome re-
 markable inſtances of his ſeverity towards ſinners in
 this world. As he is pleaſed ſometimes to give good
 men ſome fore-taſtes of heaven, and earneſts of their
 future happineſs ; ſo likewise by ſome preſent ſtroke,
 to let ſinners feel what they are to expect hereafter,
 ſome ſparks of hell do now and then fall upon the
 conſciences of ſinners. That fear which is ſome-
 times kindled in men’s conſciences in this life, that
 horrible anguiſh, and thoſe unſpeakable terrors which
 ſome ſinners have had experience of in this world,
 may ſerve to forewarn us of “ the wrath which is to
 “ come,” and to convince us of the reality of thoſe
 expreſſions of the torments of hell, by “ the worm
 “ that dies not, and the fire that is not quenched.”
 That miraculous deluge, which ſwallowed up the old
 world,

world, that hell which was rained down from heaven, in those terrible showers of fire and brimstone, to consume Sodom and Gomorrah; the earth opening her mouth upon Corah and his seditious company, to let them down, as it were, quick into hell: these and many other remarkable judgments of God, in several ages, upon particular persons, and upon cities and nations, may satisfy us, in some measure, of the severity of God against sin, and be, as it were, pledges to assure sinners of the insupportable misery and torments of the next life.

(5.) The argument is much stronger the other way, that because the punishment of sinners is delayed so long, therefore it will be much heavier and severer when it comes; that the wrath of God is growing all this while, and as we “fill up the measures of our sins,” he fills the “vials of his wrath: Rom. ii. 5. and according to thy hard and impenitent heart, treasurest up to thyself wrath, against the day of wrath, and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God.” God now keeps in his displeasure: but all the while we go on in an impenitent course, the wrath of God is continually increasing, and will at last be manifested by the righteous judgment of God upon sinners. God now exerciseth and displayeth his milder attributes, his goodness, and mercy, and patience: but these will not always hold out, there is a dreadful day a coming, wherein (as the apostle speaks) God will “shew his wrath, and make his power known,” after he hath “endured with much long-suffering the vessels of wrath fitted for destruction.” All this long time of God’s patience and forbearance his wrath is kindled, and he is whetting his glittering sword, and making sharp his arrows;” and
this

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this long preparation doth portend a much more dreadful execution : so that we should reason thus from the long-suffering of God ; God bears with us, and spares us at present, and keeps in his anger therefore if we go on to provoke him, time will come when he will not spare, but his anger will flame forth, and his jealousy smoke against us. This is but reasonable to expect, that they who in this world forsake their own mercies, the mercy of God in the next should forsake them.

4. Another false conclusion which men draw from the delay of punishment, is, that because it is delayed, therefore it is not so certain : the sinner escapes for the present, and though he have some misgivings and fearful apprehensions of the future, yet he hopes his fears may be greater than his danger.

It is true, indeed, we are not so certain of the misery of wicked men in another world, as if it were present, and we lay groaning under the weight of it ; such a certainty as this would not only leave no place for doubting, but even for that which we properly and strictly call faith ; for “ faith is the evidence of “ things not seen.” But sure we have other faculties besides sense to judge of things by ; we may be sufficiently certain of many things which are neither present nor sensible, of many things past and future, upon good ground and testimony : we are sure that we were born, and yet we have no remembrance of it ; we are certain that we shall die though we never had the experience of it. Things may be certain in their causes, as well as in their present existence, if the causes be certain. The truth of God, who hath declared these things to us, is an abundant ground of assurance to us, though they be at a great distance : the certainty of things is not shaken by our wavering belief concerning them.

But,

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Besides, the very light of nature, and the common reason of mankind, hath always made a contrary inference from the long-suffering of God, and the delay of present punishment. Though men are apt to think, that because judgment is deferred, therefore it is not certain; yet the very light of nature hath taught men to reason otherwise; that because God is so patient to sinners in this life, therefore there will a time come when they shall be punished; that because this life is a time of trial and forbearance, therefore there shall be another state after this life, which shall be a season of recompence. And by this argument chiefly it was that the wisest of the heathen satisfied themselves concerning another state after this life, and answered the troublesome objection against the providence of God, from the unequal administration of things in this world, so visible in the afflictions and sufferings of good men, and the prosperity of the wicked; viz. That there would be another state that would adjust all these matters, and set them straight, when good and bad men should receive the full recompence of their deeds.

The 5th and last false conclusion, which men draw from the long-suffering of God and the delay of punishment is this; that it is, however, probably at some distance, and therefore they may sin yet a while longer, and all this danger may be prevented time enough, by a future repentance in our old age, or at the hour of death; and they are confirmed very much in this hope, because they see men much worse than themselves, great criminals and malefactors, upon two or three days warning, to perform this work of repentance very substantially, and to die with great comfort and assurance of their salvation. This is the most common delusion of all the rest, and

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hath

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hath been, I am afraid, the ruin of more souls than all the other which I have mentioned ; they may have slain their thousands," but this "it's ten thousands."

For answer to this, be pleased seriously to lay to heart these following considerations, most of which I shall speak but briefly to, because I have, upon other occasions, spoken largely to them.

(1.) If there be a future judgment, then it is certain, at how great a distance soever it may be. That which shall be a thousand years hence, will certainly be ; and it is but very small comfort and encouragement, considering the vast disproportion between time and eternity, to think, that after twenty or forty years shall be past and gone, then must I enter upon eternal misery ; then will those intolerable torments begin which shall never have an end.

(2.) But it is not certain that it is at such a distance : when we "put from us the evil day," it is many times nearer to us than we are aware, and when we think the judgment of God is at a great distance, "the judge" may be "near, even at the door." Our times are not in our own hands, but we are perfectly at the disposal of another, who when he pleaseth can put a period to them, and cause our breath to cease from our nostrils, and we shall not be ; "There is no man hath power over the spirit, to retain the spirit ; neither hath he power in the day of death," saith the wise man a little before the text. Thou dreamest, perhaps, of many years continuance in this world, and, perhaps, in the height of this vain imagination, "the decree is sealed, and the commandment come forth" to summon thee out of this world, and thou art just dropping into that misery, which thou fanciest to be at such a distance ; whilst thou art vainly promising thyself "the ease
of,

of many years," GOD may say to thee, "Thou fool, this night shall thy soul be required of thee," and then, where are all thy hopes?

(3.) Supposing the evil day were at a considerable distance, yet men run an infinite hazard in venturing all the hopes of their salvation upon a future repentance; for what knowest thou, O man! but thou mayst be surprized by a sudden stroke, which may give thee no warning, leave thee no space of repentance? a violent disease may seize upon thee, which may disorder thy understanding, and so weaken all thy faculties, as to render thee unfit for all reasonable operations: at the best, how unfit are we for the most serious work of our lives, when we are hardly fit to do any thing? Old age is a very unseasonable time for repentance, when we are full of weakness and infirmity, and our minds are crooked and bowed down by vice, as our bodies are by age, and as hard to be recovered to their first straightness; much more is it an improper time for this work, when sickness and old age meet together. There are two things in which men, in other things wise enough, do usually miscarry; in putting off the making of their wills, and their repentance, till it be too late. Men had need then be of sound understanding and perfect memory, when they set about matters of so great consequence in respect to their temporal and eternal concerns: especially when men have the happiness of all eternity to take care of and provide for, they had need have their understandings about them, and all the advantages of leisure and consideration, to make a sober reflection upon their past lives, and make up their accounts with GOD, and to set all things right between him and them; and it is well, if, after all, a repentance wilfully deferred so long,

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so short and imperfect, so confused and huddled up will at last be accepted as a tolerable atonement for the crimes and miscarriages of a long life.

(4.) Suppose thou wert sure to repent before thou leavest the world, and to do this work thoroughly which no man can promise to himself that deliberately delays it; yet this can be no reasonable encouragement to go on in an evil course, because we do but hereby aggravate our own trouble, and treasure up much more sorrow and affliction to ourselves against the day of repentance, and consequently sin on, in hopes of being hereafter so much the more troubled and grieved for what we have done; as if a man should go on to break the laws, in hopes of a more severe and exemplary punishment: sure this can be no encouragement or ground of hope to any reasonable and considerate man.

Lastly, As to the encouragement which men take from the sudden repentance of great criminals and malefactors, and their dying with so much comfort and assurance; if this be well considered, there is little comfort to be fetched from such examples. For,

1st. Though a sincere repentance in such circumstances be possible; yet it is almost impossible for the party himself concerned, much more for others, upon any good ground, to judge when it is sincere. God who knows the hearts of men, and whether, if they had lived longer, they would in the future course of their lives have justified and made good their repentance and good resolutions, only knows the sincerity of it.

But, 2dly, no certain judgment is to be made from the comfort and confidence of the party concerned; for the business is not, what comfort and confidence men have, but what ground they have for

for it: and whereas men are apt piously to suppose, that so extraordinary a comfort and assurance is wrought in them by the spirit of God, nothing is more uncertain; because we sometimes see those who give no such testimony of their repentance, to die with every whit as much courage, and comfort, and confident persuasion of their salvation, as those that do. But this, certainly, is not from the spirit of God, a natural obstinacy and courage may carry men a great way; and false and mistaken principles may fill men for the present with as much comfort and confidence, as well grounded hopes. In the church of Rome, great numbers of those who have led very wicked lives, after a formal confession and absolution, and some good words of encouragement from the priest, die as full of peace and comfort, to all appearance, as the best of men.

Indeed it is very natural to men, who find themselves in a desperate condition, to be strangely elevated and raised, upon any hopes given of escaping so great a danger as they apprehend themselves to be in; especially if these hopes be given them by a grave man, of whose piety and judgment they have a venerable opinion. When men have the sentence of death in themselves, as all wicked livers must have, they are naturally apt to be overjoyed at the unexpected news of a pardon.

To speak my mind freely in this matter, I have no great opinion of that extraordinary comfort and confidence which some have, upon a sudden repentance for great and flagrant crimes, because I cannot discern any sufficient ground for it. I think great humility and dejection of mind, and a doubtful apprehension of their condition, next almost to despair of it, would much better become them; because
their

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their case is really so very doubtful in itself. There is great reason for the repentance of such persons, and it becomes them well ; but I see very little reason for their great comfort and confidence, nor does it become their circumstances and condition. Let them exercise as deep a repentance as is possible, and “bring forth all the fruits meet for it” that are possible in so short a time ; let them humble themselves before God, and pray incessantly to him day and night for mercy ; make all the reparation they can for the injuries they have done, by confession and acknowledgment, and by making satisfaction to the parties injured, if it be in their power, by giving alms to the poor, by warning others, and endeavouring to reclaim them to a better mind and course of life ; and for the rest humbly commit themselves to the mercy of God in JESUS CHRIST ; let them imitate, as near as they can, the behaviour of the penitent thief, the only example the scripture has left us of a late repentance that proved effectual, who gave the greatest testimony that could be of a penitent sorrow for his sins, and of his faith in the SAVIOUR of the world, by a generous and courageous owning of him in the midst of his disgrace and suffering, when even his own disciples had denied and forsaken him : but we do not find in him any signs of extraordinary comfort, much less of confidence ; but he humbly commended himself to the mercy and goodness of his SAVIOUR, saying, “Lord, remember me, when thou comest into thy kingdom.”

S E R M O N C L I.

The long-suffering of God.

E C C L E S. viii. 11.

Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil.

I H A V E considered how apt men are to abuse S E R M.
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the long-suffering of God, to the hardening and encouraging of themselves in sin, and whence this comes to pass; where I considered the several false conclusions which sinners draw from the delay of punishment, as if there were no God, or providence, or difference of good and evil; or else, as is more commonly pretended, that sin is not so great an evil, and that God is not so highly offended at it, or that God is not so severe as he is represented; that the punishment of sin is not so certain, or however, it is at a distance, and may be prevented by a future repentance: all which I have spoken fully to, and endeavoured to shew the fallacy and unreasonableness of them. I shall now proceed to the

Third and last thing I propounded, which was, to answer an objection to which this discourse may seem liable; and that is this. If the long-suffering of God be the occasion of men's hardness and impenitency, then why is God so patient to sinners, when they are so prone to abuse his goodness and patience? and how is it goodness in God to forbear sinners so long, when this forbearance of his is so apt

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to minister to them an occasion of their farther mischief and greater ruin? It should seem according to this, that it would be much greater mercy to the greatest part of sinners, not to be patient toward them at all; but instantly upon the first occasion and provocation, to cut them off, and so to put a stop to their wickedness, and to hinder them from making themselves more miserable, by increasing their guilt, and “treasuring up wrath to themselves against the “day of wrath.”

This is the objection, and because it seems to be of some weight, I shall endeavour to return a satisfactory answer to it in these following particulars, And

I. I ask the sinner if he will stand to this? art thou serious, and wouldest thou in good earnest have God to deal thus with thee, to take the very first advantage to destroy thee or turn thee into hell, and to make thee miserable beyond all hopes of recovery? Consider of it again. Dost thou think it desirable, that God should deal thus with thee, and let fly his judgments upon thee so soon as ever thou hast sinned? If not, why do men trifle, and make an objection against the long-suffering of God, which they would be very loth should be made good upon them?

II. It is likewise to be considered, that the long-suffering of God toward sinners is not a total forbearance: it is usually so mixt with afflictions and judgments of one kind or other, upon ourselves or others, as to be a sufficient warning to us, if we would consider and lay it to heart, to “sin no more “lest a worse thing come upon us;” lest that judgment, which we saw inflicted upon others, come home to us. And is not this great goodness, to warn us when he might destroy us, to leave room for a retreat, when he might put our case past remedy?

All this time of God's patience, he threatens sinners, to awaken them out of their security, he punishes them gently, that we may have no ground to hope for impunity ; he makes examples of some in a more severe and remarkable manner, that others may hear, and fear, and be afraid to commit the like sins, lest the like punishment overtakes them ; he whips some offenders before our eyes, to shew us what sin deserves, and what we also may justly expect, if we do the same thing ; and will nothing be a warning to us but our own sufferings !

Nay, God doth usually send some judgment or other upon every sinner in this life ; he lets him feel the rod, that he may know that it is " an evil and bitter thing to sin against him." He exerciseth men with many afflictions and crosses, and disappointments, which their own consciences tell them are the just recompences of their deeds ; and by these lighter strokes, he gives us a merciful warning to avoid his heavier blows ; when mercy alone will not work upon us and win us, but being fed to the full, we grow wanton and foolish, he administers physick to us by affliction, and by adversity endeavours to bring us to consideration and a sober mind ; and many have been cured this way, and the judgments of God have done them that good, which his mercies and blessings could not ; for God would save us any way, by his mercy or by his judgment, by sickness or by health, by plenty or by want, by what we desire, or by what we dread ; so desirous is he of our repentance and happiness, that he leaves no method unattempted that may probably do us good ; he strikes upon every passion in the heart of man ; he works upon our love by his goodness, upon our hopes by his promises, and upon our fears,

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fears, first by his threatnings, and if they be not effectual, then by his judgments ; he tries every affection and takes hold of it, if by any means he may draw us to himself ; and will nothing warn us, but what will ruin us, and render our case desperate and past hope ?

And if any sinner be free from outward afflictions and sufferings, yet sin never fails to carry it's own punishment along with it ; there is a secret sting and worm, a divine Nemesis and revenge, that is bred in the bowels of every sin, and makes it a heavy punishment to itself ; the conscience of a sinner doth frequently torment him, and his guilt haunts and dogs him wherever he goes ; for whenever a man commits a known and wilful sin, he drinks down poison, which though it may work slowly, yet it will give him many a gripe, and if no means be used to expel it, will destroy him at last.

So that the long-suffering of God is wisely ordered, and there is such a mixture of judgments in it, as is sufficient to awaken sinners, and much more apt to deter them from sin, than to encourage them to go on and continue in it.

III. Nothing is farther from the intention of God, than to harden men by his long-suffering. This the scripture most expressly declares, 2 Pet. iii. 9. " He " is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any " should perish, but that all should come to repent- " ance." He hath a very gracious and merciful design in his patience towards sinners, and is therefore good, that he may make us so, and that we may cease to do evil. The event of God's long-suffering may, by our own fault and abuse of it, prove our ruin ; but the design and intention of it, is our repentance, " He winks at the sins of " men"

“men” (saith the son of Syrach) “that they may
“repent.” He passeth them by, and does not
take speedy vengeance upon sinners for them, that
they may have time to repent of them, and to make
their peace with him, while they are yet in the way.

Nay, his long-suffering doth not only give space
for repentance, but is a great argument and encour-
agement to it. That he is so loth to surprize sin-
ners, that he gives them the liberty of second
thoughts, time to reflect upon themselves, to consi-
der what they have done, and to retract it by re-
pentance, is a sufficient intimation that he hath no
mind to ruin us, that “he desires not the death of
“a sinner, but rather that he should turn from his
“wickedness and live.” And should not this good-
ness of his make us sorry that we have offended him?
doth it not naturally lead and invite us to repent-
ance? what other interpretation can we make of
his patience, what other use in reason should we
make of it, but to repent and return, that we may
be saved?

IV. There is nothing in the long-suffering of
God, that is in truth any ground of encouragement
to men in any evil course; the proper and natural
tendency of God’s goodness is to lead men to re-
pentance, and by repentance to bring them to hap-
piness; Rom. ii. 4. “Despise not the riches of
“his goodness and patience, and long-suffering, not
“knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee
“to repentance?” This St. Peter, with relation
to these very words of St. Paul, interprets, leading
to salvation; 2 Pet. iii. 15. “And account that
“the long-suffering of our Lord is salvation, as
“our beloved brother Paul also hath written un-
“to you.” Now where did St. Paul write so, un-

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less in this text ; “ not knowing that the goodness
 “ of God leads to repentance ? ” It is not only
 great ignorance, and a very gross mistake, to think
 that it is the design and intention of God’s patience
 and long-suffering to encourage men in sin ; but
 likewise to think, that in the nature of the thing,
 goodness can have any tendency to make men evil ;
 “ not knowing that the goodness of God leads to
 “ repentance.”

V. That through the long-suffering of God,
 sinners are hardened in their evil ways, is wholly to
 be ascribed to their abuse of God’s goodness ; it is
 neither the end and intention, nor the proper and
 natural effect of the thing, but the accidental event
 of it, through our own fault. And is this any real
 objection against the long-suffering of God ? May
 not God be patient, though sinners be impenitent ?
 May not he be good, though we be so foolish as to
 make an ill use of his goodness ? Because men are
 apt to abuse the mercies and favours of God, is it
 therefore a fault in him to bestow them upon us ? Is
 it not enough for us to abuse them, but will we chal-
 lenge God also of unkindness in giving them ? May
 not God use wise and fitting means for our recovery,
 because we are so foolish as not to make a wise use of
 them ? And must he be charged with our ruin, be-
 cause he seeks by all means to prevent it ? Is it not
 enough to be injurious to ourselves, but will we be
 unthankful to God also ? When God hath laid out
 the riches of his goodness and patience upon sinners,
 will they challenge him as accessary to their ruin ?
 As if a foolish heir, that hath prodigally wasted the fair
 estate that was left him, should be so far from blam-
 ing himself as to charge his father with undoing him.
 Are these the best returns which the infinite mercy
 and

and patience of GOD hath deserved from us? Do we thus requite the LORD, foolish people and unwise!

GOD's patience would save sinners, but they ruin themselves by their abuse of it; let the blame then lie where it is due, and let God have the glory of his goodness, though men refuse the benefit and advantage of it.

VI. And lastly, but because this objection pincheth hardest in one point; viz. That GOD certainly foresees that a great many will abuse his long-suffering, to the encreasing of their guilt, and the aggravating of their condemnation; and how is his long-suffering any mercy and goodness to those, who he certainly fore-knows will in the event be so much the more miserable, for having had so much patience extended to them? Therefore for a full answer, I desire these six things may be considered.

1. That GOD designs this life for the trial of our obedience, that according as we behave ourselves he may reward or punish us in another world.

2. That there could be no trial of obedience, nor any capacity of rewards and punishments, but upon the supposition of freedom and liberty; that is, that we do not do what we do upon force and necessity, but upon free choice.

3. That GOD, by virtue of the infinite perfection of his knowledge, does clearly and certainly foresee all future events, even those which are most contingent, such as are the arbitrary actions of free and voluntary agents. This I know hath been denied, but without reason; since it is not only contrary to the common apprehensions of mankind from the very light of nature, that GOD should not fore-know future events, but to clear and express scripture; and that in such instances, for the sake of which they deny

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deny God's foreknowledge in general of the future actions of free and voluntary agents, I mean, that the scripture expressly declares God's determinate foreknowledge of the most wicked actions; as the crucifying of CHRIST, who is said, according to the determinate counsel and fore-knowledge of God, to have been by wicked hands crucified and slain.

4. That the bare fore-knowledge of things future hath no more influence upon them to make them to be, than the sight and knowledge of things present hath upon them to make them to be present. I may see or know that the sun is risen, without seeing the cause of it's rising; and no more is bare knowledge of future events the cause that they are, when they are. And if any man ask, how God can certainly fore-know things, which depend upon free and arbitrary causes, unless he do some way decree and determine them? I answer, that this is not a fair and reasonable demand, to ask of men, who have but finite understandings, to make out and declare all the ways that infinite knowledge hath of knowing and of fore-seeing the actions of free creatures, without prejudice to their liberty and freedom of acting. However, it is of the two much more credible to reason, that infinite knowledge should certainly fore-know things, which our understanding cannot imagine how they should be fore-known, than that God should any ways be the author of sin, by determining and decreeing the wicked actions of men. The first only argues the imperfection of our understandings; but the other lays the greatest blemish and imperfection that can be upon the divine nature.

So that this difficult controversy about the foreknowledge of God is brought to this point, whether

man had better believe, that infinite knowledge may be able to fore-know things in a way which our finite understanding cannot comprehend: or to ascribe something to God, from whence it would unavoidably follow, that he is the author of sin. The first is only a modest and just acknowledgment of our own ignorance; the last is the utmost and greatest absurdity that a man can be brought to; and to say that we cannot believe the fore-knowledge of God, unless we can make out the particular manner of it, is more unreasonable, than if an ignorant man should deny a difficult proposition in Euclid or Archimedes to be demonstrated, because he knows not how to demonstrate it.

5. And consequently fore-knowledge and liberty may very well consist; and notwithstanding God's fore-knowledge of what men will do, they may be as free as if he did not fore-know it. And,

Lastly, That God doth not deal with men according to his fore-knowledge of the good or bad use of their liberty, but according to the nature and reason of things; and therefore if he be long-suffering toward sinners, and do not cut them off upon the first provocation, but give them a space and opportunity of repentance, and use all proper means and arguments to bring them to repentance, and be ready to afford his grace to excite good resolutions in them, and to second and assist them, and they refuse and resist all this; their wilful obstinacy and impenitency is as culpable, and God's goodness and patience as much to be acknowledged, as if God did not foresee the abuse of it; because his foresight and knowledge of what they would do, laid no necessity upon them to do what they did.

If a prince had the privilege of fore-knowledge as
God

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God hath, and did certainly foresee, that a great many of his subjects would certainly incur the penalty of his laws, and that others would abuse his goodness and clemency to them; yet if he would govern them like free and reasonable creatures, he ought to make the same wise laws to restrain their exorbitancy, and to use the same clemency in all cases that did fairly admit of it, as if he did not at all foresee what they would do, nor how they would abuse his clemency; for it is nevertheless fit to make wise and reasonable laws, and to govern with equity and clemency, though it were certainly foreseen that they that are governed would act very foolishly and unreasonably in the use of their liberty. It is great goodness in God to give men the means and opportunity of being saved, though they abuse this goodness to their farther ruin; and he may be heartily grieved for that folly and obstinacy in men, which he certainly foresees will end in their ruin; and may with great seriousness and sincerity wish they would do otherwise, and were as wise to do good, as they are wilful to do evil. And thus he is represented in scripture, as regretting the mischief which men wilfully bring upon themselves; "O that they were wise, O that they would understand, and consider their latter end!"

And this is sufficient to vindicate the goodness of God in his patience and long-suffering to sinners, and to make them wholly guilty of all that befalls them for their wilful contempt and abuse of it.

I shall draw some inferences from this whole discourse upon this argument.

I. This shews the unreasonableness and perverse disingenuity of men, who take occasion to harden and encourage themselves in sin from the long-suffering

ing of God, which above all things in the world should melt and soften them. Thou hast sinned, and art liable to the justice of God, sentence is gone forth, but God respites the execution of it, and hath granted thee a reprieve, and time and opportunity to sue out thy pardon. Now what use ought we in reason to make of this patience of God towards us? We ought certainly "to break off our sins by a speedy repentance, lest iniquity be our ruin;" immediately to sue out our pardon, and "to make our peace with God, while we are yet in the way," and to resolve, never any more willingly to offend that God who is so gracious and merciful, so long-suffering and full of compassion. But what use do men commonly make of it? They take occasion to confirm and strengthen themselves in their wickedness, and to reason themselves into vain and groundless hopes of impunity. Now what a folly is this, because punishment doth not come, therefore to hasten it, and to draw it down upon ourselves? Because it hath not yet overtaken us, therefore to go forth and meet it? Because there is yet a possibility of escaping it, therefore to take a certain course to make it unavoidable? Because there is yet hope concerning us, therefore to make our case desperate and past remedy? See how unreasonably men bring ruin upon themselves; so that well might the Psalmist ask that question, "Have all the workers of iniquity no knowledge?"

But their folly and unreasonableness is not so great, but their perverseness and disingenuity is greater. To sin, because God is long-suffering, is to be evil, because he is good, and to provoke him, because he spares us; it is to strive with God, and to contend with his goodness, as if we were resolved to try the utmost length of his patience; and because God is

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loth to punish, therefore to urge and importune him to that which is so contrary to his inclination.

II. This may serve to convince men of the great evil and danger of thus abusing the long-suffering of God. It is a provocation of the highest nature, because it is to trample upon his dearest attributes, those which he most delights and glories in, his goodness and mercy; for the long-suffering of God is his goodness to the guilty, and his mercy to those who deserve to be miserable.

Nothing makes our ruin more certain, more speedy, and more intolerable, than the abuse of God's goodness and patience. After God had born long with that rebellious people, the children of Israel, and notwithstanding all their murmurings, all their infidelity and impenitency, had spared them ten times, at last he sets his seal to their ruin, Heb. iii. 8, 9. "Harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness, when your fathers proved me, and saw my works forty years." This was a high provocation indeed, to harden their hearts under the patience and long-suffering of God, after forty years trial and experience of it; v. 10. "Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They are a people that do err in their hearts, for they have not known my ways." And what was the issue of all this? Upon this God takes up a fixed resolution to bear no longer with them, but to cut them off from the blessings he had promised to bestow upon them; "He sware in his wrath, that they should not enter into his rest. To whom sware he, that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not?" Or, as the word may be rendered, "to them that were disobedient?" that is, to them who

went

went on in their rebellion against him, after he had suffered their manners forty years.

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And as the abuse of God's patience renders our destruction more certain, so more speedy and more intolerable. We think that because God suffers long, we will suffer always; and because punishment is delayed, therefore it will never come; but it will come the sooner for this: so our LORD tells us, Luke xii. When "the servant said, His LORD delayed his coming; the LORD of that servant shall come in a day that he looks not for him, and at an hour when he is not aware, and shall cut him in sunder, and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites." None so like to be surprised by the judgment of God, as those who trespass so boldly upon his patience.

III. To persuade us to make a right use of the patience and long-suffering of God, and to comply with the merciful end and design of God therein.

1. It is the design of God's long-suffering, to give us a space of repentance. Were it not that God had this design and reasonable expectation from us, he would not reprieve a sinner for one moment, but would execute his judgments upon him so soon as ever he had offended: this our SAVIOUR declares to us by the parable of the fig-tree, Luke xiii. 6. Were it not that God expects from us the fruit of repentance, he would "cut us down", and not suffer us, "to cumber the ground"; after he had "waited three years, seeking fruit and finding none, he spares it one year more, to see if it would bear fruit."

2. The long-suffering of God is a great encouragement to repentance. We see by his patience that he is not ready to take advantage against us; that he spares us when we offend, is a very good sign that he will forgive us if we repent. Thus natural

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light would reason, and so the king of Nineveh, a heathen, reasons, "Who can tell if God will turn and repent?" But we are fully assured of this by the gracious declarations of the gospel, and the way of pardon and forgiveness which is therein established through faith in the blood of JESUS CHRIST, who was made "a propitiation for the sins of the whole world."

Therefore the long-suffering of God should be a powerful argument to us "to break off our sins by repentance:" for this is the end of God's patience; "He is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. He hath no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked should turn from his way and live." God every where expresseth a vehement desire and earnest expectation of our repentance and conversion; Jer. iv. 14. "O Jerusalem! wash thy heart from wickedness, that thou mayest be saved." And chap. 13. 27. "Wo unto thee Jerusalem! wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?" He who is so patient as to the punishment of our sins, is almost impatient of our repentance for them; "Wilt thou not be made clean? when shall it once be?" And can we stand out against his earnest desire of our happiness, whom we have so often and so long provoked to make us miserable?

Let us then return into ourselves, and think seriously what our case and condition is; how we have lived, and how long the patience of God hath suffered our manners, and waited for our repentance, and how inevitable and intolerable the misery of those must be who live and die in the contempt and abuse of it; let us heartily repent of our wicked lives, and say, "What have we done?" How careless have

we been of our own happiness, and what pains have we taken to undo ourselves?

Let us speedily set about this work, because we do not know how long the patience of God may last, and the opportunities of our salvation be continued to us. This day of God's grace and patience will have an end, therefore, as the prophet exhorts, Isa. lv. 6. "Seek the LORD while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near." Now God graciously invites sinners to come to him, and is ready to receive them; nay, if they do but move towards him, he is ready to go forth and meet them half way; but the time will come, when he will bid them depart from him, when they shall cry, "LORD, LORD, open unto us," and the door of mercy shall be shut against them.

All the while thou delayest this necessary work, thou ventur'est thy immortal soul, and puttest thy eternal salvation upon a desperate hazard; and should God snatch thee suddenly away in an impenitent state, what would become of thee? Thou art yet in the way, and God is yet reconcilable, but death is not far off, and perhaps much nearer to thee than thou art aware; at the best thy life is uncertain, and death will infallibly put a period to this day of God's grace and patience.

Repentance is a work so necessary, that methinks no man should lose so much time as to deliberate, whether he should set about it or not; *de necessariis nulla est deliberatio*; "no man deliberates about what he must do, or be undone if he do it not." It is a work of so great consequence and concernment, and the delay of it so infinitely dangerous, that one would think no wise man could entertain a thought of deferring it. What greater folly and stupidity can there be,

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be, than for men to venture their immortal souls, and to run an apparent hazard in matters of everlasting consequence?

This day of God's patience is the great opportunity of our salvation, and if we let it slip, it is never to be recovered: if we mis-improve this time of our life, we shall not be permitted to live it over again to improve it better. Our state of trial ends with this life, after that God will prove us no more; then we shall wish, "O that I had known in that my day, the things which belonged to my peace, but now they are hid from mine eyes; therefore to day, whilst it is called to day, harden not your hearts, make no tarrying to turn to the LORD, and put not off from day to day; for suddenly shall the wrath of the LORD break forth, and in thy security thou shalt be destroyed; exercise repentance in the time of health, and defer not till death to be justified."

S E R M O N CLII.

The power of God.

P S A L. LXII. II.

God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this, that power belongeth unto God.

IN treating of the attributes of God, I have considered those which relate to the divine understanding, to which I referred his knowledge and wisdom; those also which relate to the divine will;

viz.

viz. God's justice, truth, holiness, and goodness : S E R M.
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I come now to consider his power of acting, which
is his omnipotency ; this I shall speak to from these
words.

In the beginning of this Psalm, David declares that
God was the great object of his trust and confidence,
and that all his hopes and expectation of safety and
deliverance were from him, v. 1, 2. And this makes
him challenge his enemies for all their mischievous
qualities and devices against him, as vain attempts,
v. 3, 4. Hereupon he chargeth himself to continue
his trust and confidence in God, from whom was all
his expectation, and who was able to save and deli-
ver him ; v. 5, 6, 7. And from his example and
experience, he encourageth and exhorts all others to
trust in God, v. 8. and that from two arguments.

1. Because all other objects of our trust and con-
fidence are vain and insufficient, and will fail those
that rely upon them. If we rely upon any thing
in this world, it must either be persons or things ;
but we cannot safely repose our trust in either of these.
Not in persons : they may be reduced to one of these
two heads, either high or low : Those that are of a
mean condition, it would be in vain to trust them ;
they that cannot secure themselves from meanness, can-
not secure others from mischief, "men of low degree
are vanity : " But the great ones of the world, they
would seem to promise something of assistance and se-
curity to us ; but if we depend upon them, they will
frustrate us, "men of high degree are a lie." As for
the things of the world, that which men usually place
their confidence in, is riches ; these are either got by
unlawful, or lawful means ; if they be ill gotten, by
oppression or robbery, they will be so far from secur-
ing us from evil, that they will bring it upon us ; if
they

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they be well gotten, they are of an uncertain nature, that we have little reason to place our hopes in them; “if riches increase, set not your hearts upon them,” “that is, your hope; for heart in scripture signifies any of the affections.

2. Because God is the proper object of our trust and confidence. We may safely rely upon any one, in whom these two things concur, a power to help us, and goodness to incline him so to do. Now David tells us, that both these are eminently in God, and do in a peculiar manner belong to him; power, v. 11. and goodness, v. 12.

I shall speak to that which David makes the first ground of our confidence, the power of God; power belongs to God: For which he brings the testimony of God himself, “once hath God spoken, “yea twice have I heard this.” Some interpreters trouble themselves about the meaning of this expression, as if it did refer to some particular revelation of God; and then again they are troubled how to reconcile God’s speaking this but once, with David’s hearing it twice: but I do not love to spy mysteries in these expressions which are capable of a plain sense; for I understand no more by it but this, that God hath several times revealed this; he frequently declared himself by this attribute, “once, “yea twice,” that is, he hath spoken it often and David heard it often. This is answerable to that phrase of the Latins, *Semel atque iterum*; and it is usual in all writers, to use a certain number for an uncertain, and particularly among the poets, *Felices ter & amplius*, Hor. And so in the poetical writers of scripture, Job v. 19. he hath “delivered thee in “six troubles, yea, in seven there shall no evil “touch thee;” that is, in several and various troubles.

bles. Eccles. xi. 2. "Give a portion to seven, and
"also to eight;" that is, distribute thy charity to
many; and which is nearest to this, Job xl. 5.
"Once have I spoken, but I will not answer; yea
"twice, but I will proceed no farther:" that is, I
have had several discourses with my friends; and xxxiii.
14. "God speaketh once, yea twice, in a dream, in
"a vision of the night;" that is, God reveals him-
self in several ways and manners to men; so here
"God hath spoken once, yea twice," that is, God
hath often declared this. And if I would be so cu-
rious to refer to a particular declaration of God, I
should think, that it related either to the preface to
the law, "I am the LORD thy God," that is, the
great and powerful God, "that brought thee out of
"the land of Egypt;" or rather to the declaration
which God made of himself to Abraham, Isaac, and
Jacob, by the name of the Almighty God, Gen. xvii.
1. Concerning which revelation of God, it is said
expressly, Exod. vi. 3. "I appeared unto Abraham,
"and Isaac, and Jacob, by the name of God Al-
"mighty, but by my name Jehovah, was I not
"known to them."

But that which I design to speak to, is the propo-
sition itself, that power belongs to God;" that is,
that the excellency of power, power in it's highest
degree and perfection; "all power belongs to God,"
that is, that omnipotence is a property or perfection
of the divine nature.

In the handling of this, I shall shew,

First, What we are to understand by the omnipo-
tence of God.

Secondly, That this perfection belongs to God.

First, What we are to understand by the omnipo-
tence of God. And this I shall consider,

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I. As to the principle. And,

II. As to the exercise of it.

I. As to the principle, it is an ability to do all things, the doing of which speaks power and perfection ; that is, whatever is not repugnant either to the nature of things, or of God ; whatever does not imply a contradiction in the thing, or an imperfection in the doer ; an ability to do all things which are consistent with itself, and with the divine nature and perfection ; by which we must mean an executive power, the effect whereof is without himself, for what he is said to do within himself, the acts of his understanding and will, as we conceive his will to be distinct from his power, are not to be referred to his omnipotence. To have a right conception of omnipotence we must imagine the most perfect active principle that we can, and it is still something more perfect than that, or any thing we can imagine. To help our conception,

1. Let us imagine a principle from which all other power is derived, and upon which it depends, and to which it is perfectly subject and subordinate.

2. A perfect active principle, which can do, not only what any finite being or creature can do, but what all beings joined together can do ; nay, more and greater things than they all can do.

3. A perfect active principle, to which nothing can make any considerable, much less effectual resistance, which can check and countermand at pleasure, and carry down before it, and annihilate all other powers that we can imagine besides this ; because we cannot imagine any other power, that is not derived from this, and does not depend upon it.

4. A perfect active principle, which can do all things in a most perfect manner, and can do all things

at once and in an instant, and that with ease. We can but do one thing at once, and the greater and more considerable it is, the more time it will take us to do it, and we find it the harder and more difficult to be done; but God, to whose knowledge all things are present at once, and together, and the acts of whose will are as quick and perfect as of his understanding, hath a power answerable to the perfection of both; and therefore it is as easy to him to do all things, as one thing; at once, as successively, and in time. For this is the privilege of an infinite spirit, that it does not only act without hands and material engines or instruments, as every spirit doth, but without motion from one place to another, because he is every where, and fills all places; he acts *per modum voluntatis*, as if his actings were nothing else but a willing that such a thing be done, and *ipso facto* every thing is so, as he wills it should be, and when he wills it should be; as if things did start up into being, or vanish out of being, as if they did break forth into being, and sculk again into nothing, and undergo such and such changes, *ad nutum voluntatis*, "at the beck of his will." And this is the most perfect way of acting that can be imagined, which the scripture seems to express to us when it represents God as "making things by his word, upholding all things by the word of his power," as if he did but "speak the word," and say, "Let such a thing be, and it was so;" as if there were nothing more required to the doing of any thing, but an express act of the divine will, which is all we can understand by God's speaking, by his word, and voice, and saying, "Let things be"; but the least that it can signify, is the quick and speedy manner of working,

I. As to the principle. And,

II. As to the exercise of it.

I. As to the principle, it is an ability to do all things, the doing of which speaks power and perfection ; that is, whatever is not repugnant either to the nature of things, or of God ; whatever does not imply a contradiction in the thing, or an imperfection in the doer ; an ability to do all things which are consistent with itself, and with the divine nature and perfection ; by which we must mean an executive power, the effect whereof is without himself, for what he is said to do within himself, the acts of his understanding and will, as we conceive his will to be distinct from his power, are not to be referred to his omnipotence. To have a right conception of omnipotence we must imagine the most perfect active principle that we can, and it is still something more perfect than that, or any thing we can imagine. To help our conception,

1. Let us imagine a principle from which all other power is derived, and upon which it depends, and to which it is perfectly subject and subordinate.

2. A perfect active principle, which can do, not only what any finite being or creature can do, but what all beings joined together can do ; nay, more and greater things than they all can do.

3. A perfect active principle, to which nothing can make any considerable, much less effectual resistance, which can check and countermand at pleasure, and carry down before it, and annihilate all other powers that we can imagine besides this ; because we cannot imagine any other power, that is not derived from this, and does not depend upon it.

4. A perfect active principle, which can do all things in a most perfect manner, and can do all things

at once and in an instant, and that with ease. We can but do one thing at once, and the greater and more considerable it is, the more time it will take us to do it, and we find it the harder and more difficult to be done; but God, to whose knowledge all things are present at once, and together, and the acts of whose will are as quick and perfect as of his understanding, hath a power answerable to the perfection of both; and therefore it is as easy to him to do all things, as one thing; at once, as successively, and in time. For this is the privilege of an infinite spirit, that it does not only act without hands and material engines or instruments, as every spirit doth, but without motion from one place to another, because he is every where, and fills all places; he acts *per modum voluntatis*, as if his actings were nothing else but a willing that such a thing be done, and *ipso facto* every thing is so, as he wills it should be, and when he wills it should be; as if things did start up into being, or vanish out of being, as if they did break forth into being, and sculk again into nothing, and undergo such and such changes, *ad nutum voluntatis*, “at the beck of his will.” And this is the most perfect way of acting that can be imagined, which the scripture seems to express to us when it represents God as “making things by his word, upholding all things by the word of his power,” as if he did but “speak the word,” and say, “Let such a thing be, and it was so;” as if there were nothing more required to the doing of any thing, but an express act of the divine will, which is all we can understand by God’s speaking, by his word, and voice, and saying, “Let things be”; but the least that it can signify, is the quick and speedy manner of working,

whereby God is able to do things in an instant, as soon as a word can be spoken.

And as he can do all things at once, and in an instant ; so with ease, without any pain or laborious endeavour ; for what is it that can object any difficulty to him ? At the first creation of things there was nothing to resist him ; and since the creation, there is nothing but what was made by him, and consequently all whose power is derived from him, and depends upon him, and is subject to him, and being finite and limited, is infinitely unequal to the infinite power of God ; so that we may imagine the divine power would pass through all the resistance that all created power can make, and all the difficulties it can object to it, with more ease than a bullet passeth through the thin air ; or a man would pass through a net of cobweb.

5. The most perfect active principle we can imagine, the utmost bounds and limits of whose perfection we cannot imagine, that is, when we have imagined it to be as perfect, and to act in as perfect a manner as we can imagine, yet we have not reached the perfection of it ; but after all this, that it can do many things more than we can imagine, and in a manner much more perfect than we can imagine. This is the omnipotence of God as to the principle, which hath no bounds and limits. And,

II. As to the exercise of it, it is only limited by the divine will and wisdom. The divine will determines it to it's exercise, the divine wisdom directs, and regulates the exercise of it ; that is, God exerciseth his power willingly, and not by necessity, and in such manner, for the producing such effects, and in order to such ends and purposes, as seem best to his wisdom. Hence he is said “ to act all things

“ according to his good pleasure,” and “ accord-
“ ing to the counsel of his will,” that is, freely and
wisely.

As to the extent of this power, I said it was an
ability to do all things that are consistent with itself,
and with the nature and perfection of God.

First, that are consistent with itself, that is, with
a power to do all things. It is a contradiction to
imagine, that omnipotence can do that, which, if it
could be done, would render all power insignificant.
Upon this account, the divine power is not said to
extend to the working of any thing which implies a
contradiction, and the terms whereof speak a repug-
nancy to one another, and mutually destroy one ano-
ther, and the doing whereof is contrary to the na-
ture of the thing which is supposed to be done, that
is, is nonsense, and cannot be imagined to be. For
example, that a thing should be, and not be at the
same time. For a power to make a thing to be, so
as it should not be while it is, signifies nothing; be-
cause such a being as is not, is nothing; and to
make such a being, would be to do nothing, and
consequently such a power would signify nothing.
So likewise we cannot say, that the divine power can
cause, that the same thing should be made and not
be made, that that which hath been, should not
have been; for the power which makes a thing so
as that it was not made, and causeth a thing to have
been, so as that it hath not been, does nothing; and
consequently is no power. Nor can we say, that
the divine power can effect that any thing should be
made by itself, that is, be the cause of it's own be-
ing; for that would be to cause that a thing should
be before it is, that is, be, when it is not, which
signifies nothing. We cannot say that the divine
power

power can effect, that twice two should not make four ; for that would be to cause that things should not be what they are, if they be at all, which is to cause that things should be and not be at all, when they are, which amounts to nothing.

We cannot say, the divine power can make a found to be seen, and colour to be heard ; for that would be to make colour and found all one, that is, things that differ, to be the same while they differ, which is to make colour and found not to be colour and found while they are so, which is to do nothing, and consequently argues no power.

We cannot say, the divine power can make that which is intrinsically and essentially good to be evil ; and on the contrary : or that which is necessarily true to be false ; and on the contrary. For to make that which is intrinsically and essentially good to be evil, is to make that which is always good to be sometimes evil, that is, to be evil whilst it is good, that is to make good and evil all one ; which is to bring two things together, which so soon as they do exist, destroy one another, which is to no purpose, because it is to do just nothing ; and there is the same reason of true and false.

We cannot say, that the power of God can cause that the same thing should be hot and cold, dead and alive at the same time ; because these destroy one another, and if they were both, neither of them would be, and so the effect we attribute to this power would be nothing.

We cannot say, that the divine power can effect, that the same impression should give a thing two contrary motions, upward and downward at the same time ; that the same body should be in two contrary postures, in motion and at rest, and in several

several places, which are the contradictions of transubstantiation; for, for the same body to be at the same time in two several places, is to be limited and circumscribed by each of these, that is, so to be in each of them, as not to be in the other, or in any other; so that if it be in this place, it is not in that, nor in any other besides this; if it be in that place, it is not in this, nor any other besides that; but if it be in two, it is both in this and in that, and therefore in neither of them, nor any where else; so that a power to make a body to be in two places at once, is a power to make it to be no where, that is, not to be at all, which is no power; and there is the same reason of the same body's being in contrary motion, or in motion and at rest, or in two contrary postures at the same time.

So that by all these instances it appears, that a power to do any thing which implies a contradiction, and is repugnant to the nature of things, signifies nothing, and the supposed effect of it is only to bring terms together, which if they could be brought together, so soon as they meet, will mutually take away and destroy one another, which would be vain and to no purpose.

I have the more explicitly laid open these contradictions, with relation to the gross doctrine of transubstantiation, in which all, or most of the contradictions which I have mentioned are involved. I know they stiffly deny, that these contradictions follow from that doctrine, and use pitiful shifts to avoid them; but being not able to satisfy themselves that way, if the worst should come to the worst, they can grant these contradictions, but then they fly to the power of God, which can do things which we call contradictions; or else they say, there are
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as many contradictions in the doctrine of the Trinity, which all Christians believe. And thus they reproach christianity to defend popery ; and if they cannot persuade men to be papists, do what they can to make them atheists, or at least, to hinder them from being Christians : but there is not so much malice in this objection, but there is as little strength. Is it any contradiction, that the same thing should be three and one in several respects ? which is all that the scripture teacheth concerning the Trinity : but if men will undertake to explain this more particularly than God thought fit to do, and do it in such a manner as that they cannot free themselves from contradiction, let them look to it, the christian religion is not at all concerned in this, farther than to censure such mens boldness and curiosity.

But against this exemption of things that imply a contradiction from the compass and extent of the divine power, there are two objections which are more considerable, and deserve to be taken notice of.

I. We grant God's fore-knowledge of future events, which seem to us to be impossible to be fore-known ; now why may we not as well grant that God can do things which seem to us impossible to be done by any other power, as fore-know things which it is impossible for any understanding to know ? For why should we pretend to know the utmost of what infinite power can do, any more than the utmost of what infinite understanding can know ?

Ans. I know no reason but that the argument should be granted, if there were an equal necessity of granting the possibility of those things, which seem to us impossible to be done, that there is of granting the possibility of fore-knowing future contingencies.

cies, though they seem to us impossible to be known. We must grant the possibility of fore-knowing future contingencies, because the scripture, which we believe to be a divine revelation, expressly tells us, that God doth foreknow them, and gives us instances of it in several prophecies and predictions. Now if any man can shew me as exprefs texts which say, that God can make a body to be in two places at once, I will believe it, though I do not see how it is possible ; because it is reasonable I should believe that infinite power can do many things, the possibility of which my finite understanding cannot reach. Now whereas the papists say, the scripture hath said that from which this necessarily follows, viz. " This is my body ; " this is not enough, unless they could either prove, that it is necessary to understand all texts of scripture in a rigorous and strict propriety of the letter, without admitting of any trope or figure in the words ; which they do not pretend : or else shew a clear reason, why this should be understood so, more than a thousand others ; which they have not done, and I think never can do.

But if it be farther argued ; if we grant in one case, that those things which seem to be contradictions to us may be possible, why not in all cases ? Unless we had some certain way of distinguishing between seeming contradictions and real ones. And if we grant all contradictions possible, then there is no reason to exempt these from the extent of the divine power ; but we may safely say, that the divine power can make a thing to be, and not to be at the same time. To this I answer,

1. I do not grant, that any thing, which seems to me to be a contradiction, ought to be granted by me to be possible, unless I have higher assurance and

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greater reason to believe it to be possible, than I have to believe it to be a contradiction; for example, suppose it were clearly revealed in scripture, that two bodies may be in the same place, and at the same time (which is not, nor any thing like it) then having a revelation for this, and no revelation that it is not a contradiction, I have higher assurance and greater reason to believe it possible, than that it is a contradiction; and consequently I have reason to believe it is no contradiction, and that from thence it would not follow, that the same thing may be, and not be at the same time: but though in case of divine revelation, I may believe that to be no contradiction, which seems to me to be a contradiction; yet I am not without great necessity and clear evidence to offer violence to reason, and affront the faculty of understanding which God hath endowed me withal, by entertaining any thing which seems to me to be a contradiction; which the papists do in the business of transubstantiation, without any evidence of revelation, and consequently without necessity.

2. But if this were revealed in scripture, that the same thing may be and not be at the same time, I could have no reason to believe that, because I could have no assurance, if that were true, that the scriptures were a divine revelation, or that it were to be believed if it were; for if it were true, that the same thing may be and not be, then a divine revelation may be no divine revelation, and when I am bound to believe a thing, I may be bound at the same time not to believe it, and so all things would fall into uncertainty, and the foundation of all assurance, and of all duty and obedience, both of faith and practice, would be taken away.

The 2d objection is from the power of creation,
which

which is generally acknowledged to be a making of something out of nothing ; now say the objectors, this seems as palpable a contradiction as any thing else.

Answ. To us indeed, who converse with material things, and never saw any thing made, but out of pre-existent matter, it is very hard to conceive how any thing should be created, that is produced out of nothing : but every thing that is strange is not a contradiction. It is strange to us, and hard to conceive, that there should be such a thing as a spirit, who never saw, nor can see any thing but matter ; and yet we grant there are spirits. It is hard to us to conceive how any thing should be made, but out of matter ; and yet spirit, if it were made of any thing pre-existent, cannot be made of matter : but if we will attend to those common dictates of reason, which every man, whether he will or no, must assent to, we may easily understand creation to be possible, and free from contradiction. For the clearing of this, I will proceed by these steps.

1. The true notion of creation is the bringing of something into being, which before had no being at all ; for the phrase of making something out of nothing, or out of no pre-existent matter, does mislead our understanding into odd conceits, as if nothing could be the material cause of something, or as if nothing could be what is material.

2. Every one must grant, that something is ; for we see that things are, however they came to be.

3. Every one must grant, that something is of itself, whether matter, or that being which we call God.

4. Every one must grant, that that which was of itself was always ; for nothing can begin to be of itself.

5. It is much more easy to conceive how a thing, that once was not, might sometimes be brought into being by another, than how a thing should be always of itself; for that which once was not is supposed to have something before it, by which it might be made, though not out of which it was made; but that which was always neither had nor could have any thing by which, or out of which it could be made. And why cannot a thing come into being, when there was nothing before it, out of which it was made, as well as a thing be always, when there could not be any thing before it, out of which it should be?

Secondly, I exempt those things from the extent of omnipotence, which imply imperfection, which are contrary to the nature and perfection of God, both natural and moral imperfections; for these also destroy power, because they are not arguments of power, but of impotence. Natural imperfections; as to die, to be sick, to be in want, to eat, to sleep, to forget, &c. Moral imperfections, those which contradict the holiness of God, as sin and vice, or to compel any to sin; which contradict his goodness, as to be cruel; which contradict his truth, as to lie, to deceive, to break his promise, to deny himself; Tit. i. 2. 2 Tim. ii. 13. Jam. i. 13. he is said to be ἀπείραστος κακῶν; contrary to the constancy and immutability of his nature, as to change his decree, to repent; contrary to justice and equity, as for ever to spare and to pardon obstinate sinners, eternally to punish innocent and good men; for these are moral imperfections, and contradict the holiness, and truth, and goodness, and justice, and immutability of the divine nature; and that distinction between God's absolute and ordinate power, that is,

that God hath an absolute power of doing some things, which yet upon supposition of his decree, or promise, or goodness, or justice, he cannot do, is vain and frivolous, unless men mean by it only this, that some things, which argue an imperfection, do not imply a contradiction, which is most true, but both these are absolutely and equally impossible to God. I proceed to the

Second thing I proposed, that this perfection belongs to God ; and this I shall shew,

I. From the dictates of natural light.

II. From the scripture, or divine revelation.

I. From the dictates of natural light. This was one of the most usual titles which the heathens gave to their supreme deity, *optimus maximus* ; next to his goodness they placed his greatness, which does chiefly appear in his power ; and they did not only attribute a great power to him but an omnipotence. *Nihil est quod Deus efficere non potest*, saith Tully de Div. Now their natural reason did convince them, that this perfection did belong to God by these three arguments.

1. From those two great instances and expressions of his power, creation and providence ; for the heathens did generally acknowledge the making of the world, and the preservation and government of it, to be the effects of power, determined by goodness, and regulated by wisdom. Hence they gave those titles to God of *opifex rerum* and *rector mundi*. I say generally, I except Aristotle, who supposed the world not to have been made, but to have been from eternity ; and Epicurus with his followers, who ascribed the regular and orderly frame of nature to a happy casualty and fortunate concurrence of atoms : but generally the wiser did look upon the vast frame
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of nature, this stately fabrick of the world, and the upholding and preserving of it, as an argument of a divine and invisible power. And so the apostle tells us, Rom. i. 20. that by the light of nature, “ the invisible things of God were clearly seen by “ the things that were made, even his eternal power “ and godhead.”

2. Because all other perfections without this would be insignificant and ineffectual, or else could not be at all. Without this goodness would be an empty piece of good meaning, and not able to give any demonstration of itself; knowledge would be an idle speculation; and wisdom to contrive things, without power to effect them, would be an useless thing. There would be no such thing as justice, if the divine nature were without a power to reward and punish; no such thing as faithfulness, if he had not a power to perform what he promises; no providence, for it would be in vain for him that hath no power to take upon him to govern and intermeddle in the affairs of the world.

3. Without this there could be no religion. Take away the power of God, and there can be no foundation of faith and trust, no reason for fear; all arguments from hope and fear would be taken away; we could not expect any good, nor fear any harm from an impotent being that could do nothing. The sanction of God's laws would be taken away. To give authority to laws, there must not only be a right to command, but power to back those commands; the grand security and last resort of all government and authority is power; James iv. 12. “ There is one law-giver, who is able to save, and “ to destroy.” None can be a law-giver, but he that hath this power, to reward and punish, to make

make men happy or miserable, "to save, or to destroy." Men would not pray to God, nor make any address to him, if they did not believe he were able to supply their wants, and relieve them in their straits; *Nec in hunc furorem omnes mortales consensissent alloquendi surda numina & inefficaces deos*, Sen. There would be no encouragement for men to serve God, if they did not believe that he were able to reward them, and bring them to happiness, and to defend them against all the enemies of their welfare, so that it should not be in the power of the most malicious spirits to hinder them of their happiness.

II. From scripture or divine revelation. In producing texts to this purpose, I will proceed by these steps.

1. Take notice of those which in general ascribe power, and might, and strength to God. Psal. xxiv.

8. "The LORD strong and mighty. So girt with power; the mighty God; thine is the greatness and the power; thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory." Of the same nature are those places which call upon all creatures to ascribe this to God; "Give unto the LORD, ye mighty, give unto the LORD glory and strength."

2. Those which ascribe this to God in an eminent degree. Job ix. 4. "He is mighty in strength; excellent in power, who is like unto him? The LORD Jehovah is everlasting strength."

3. Those texts which ascribe such a power as transcends any human or created power. Such as those which express all the power which men have to be derived from God; John xix. 11. "Thou couldest have no power at all, except it were given thee from above." And those which advance the power of God above the power of men; Luke

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Luke xviii. 27. "The things which are impossible
" with men, are possible with God; he is able to
" do exceeding abundantly above all that we can
" ask or think." Eph. iii. 20. 2 Chron. xx. 6.
Job ix. 4. "According to his mighty power,
" whereby he is able to subdue all things to himself,"
Phil. iii. 21. Dan. iv. 35. Those which declare all
things to be equally easy to him, and nothing diffi-
cult; "There is nothing too hard for thee," Jer.
xxxii. 17. 2 Chron. xiv. 11. 1 Sam. xiv. 6.

4. Those which ascribe all power to him, by
the titles of almighty, all-sufficient, Gen. xvii. 1.
Rev. iv. 8, 11. xv. 3. xvi. 7. xix. 26. Job xlii. 2.
"Thou canst do all things," Matth. xix. 6. Mark
xx. 27. Luke i. 37.

I have dispatched what I proposed upon this ar-
gument, give me leave to apply all in the following
particulars.

Use. First, the consideration of God's omnipo-
tence may cause terror to wicked men. All this
power which I have described, or rather, which is so
great that I cannot describe it, is engaged against
sinners; "His power and his wrath is against all
" that forsake him," Ezra viii. 22. And who
knows what those words signify, Psal. xc. 11.
"Who knoweth the power of thine anger? As is
" thy fear, so is thy wrath." There is no passion
in the heart of man more infinite than our fear, it
troubles us with jealousy and suspicion of the utmost
that may happen; but when we have extended our
fears to the utmost, the power of God's wrath
reacheth farther. Whenever we sin, we challenge
the Almighty, and dare infinite power to do it's worst
to us; Job xv. 25. speaking of the wicked man,
"He stretcheth out his hand against God, and
" strengtheneth

“strengtheneth himself against the Almighty.” SERM.

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Whom wilt thou fear, if not him who can make thee extremely happy or miserable for ever?” Will ye pro-

voke the LORD to jealousy? are ye stronger than

he?” Because he doth nothing against thee for the present, thinkest thou he can do nothing? Nah. i. 3.

“He is slow to anger, and great in power, and will

not acquit the wicked.” There is a day coming,

when “the Son of man shall come in the clouds of

“heaven, with power and great glory.”

Secondly, The consideration of God’s omnipotence should check the pride and vain confidence of men. What have we to be proud of? “What have

we that we have not received? Where then is

“cause of boasting? Who may glory in his sight?”

Those that have the greatest power should remember whence it is derived, and render back the glory

of it to the fountain of it. Psal. xxix. 1. “Give

“unto the LORD, O ye mighty, give unto the

“LORD glory and strength.” So likewise it should

take men off from relying upon their own strength,

which at the best is but “an arm of flesh,” as the

scripture calls it, for the weakness of it. Do we not

see, that many times “the battle is not to the strong?”

That things are not done “by might and by power,

“but by the spirit of the LORD.” When he appears

against the most potent, “their hearts melt within

“them, and there is no more spirit left in them,” as

it is said of the mighty inhabitants of Canaan, Josh. v. 1.

Thirdly, We should make this omnipotence of

God the object of our trust and confidence. This is

the most proper use we can make of this doctrine, as

David does in this Psalm; and this was used for a

form of blessing the people in the name of God;

Psal. cxxxvi. 3. “The LORD that made heaven and

“earth,

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“ earth, bless thee.” And David, when he magnifies God’s deliverance of his people from the multitude of their enemies, resolves it into this, “ our help standeth in the name of the LORD, who made heaven and earth.” Thus did the great pattern and example of faith encourage and support his confidence in God in a very difficult trial ; he staggered not at it, because “ he believed God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things that be not, as though they were : therefore against hope he believed in hope, &c.” Rom. iv. 17, &c. This gives life to all our devotion, to be persuaded that God is able to do for us exceedingly above what we can ask or think,” and that “ his is the kingdom, the power and the glory.”

I shall only caution two things, as to our reliance on the power of God.

I. Labour to be such persons, to whom God hath promised that he will engage and employ his omnipotence for their good. If we hope for any good from the Almighty, we must “ walk before him, and be perfect,” as he said to Abraham. Good men have a peculiar interest in God’s power ; hence he is called “ the strength of Israel,” and “ the mighty one of Israel.” If we do what God requires of us, we may expect that he will put forth his power, and exert his arm for us ; but if we disobey, we must expect he will manifest his power against us, Ez. viii. 22. When we “ do well,” we may “ commit the keeping of our souls to him,” 1 Pet. iv. 19.

II. Our expectations from the omnipotence of God must be with submission to his pleasure, and goodness, and wisdom ; we must not expect that God will manifest his power, when we think there is occasion

occasion for it ; but when it seems best to him, he will so employ his omnipotence, as to manifest his goodness and wisdom.

And with these two cautions, we may rely upon him in all our wants, both spiritual and temporal ; for his divine power can “ give us all things that pertain to life and godliness ;” 2 Pet. i. 3. We may trust him at all times, for the omnipotent God “ neither slumbereth nor sleepeth ; the Almighty fainteth not, neither is he weary : trust ye in the LORD for ever, for in the LORD Jehovah is everlasting strength.”

S E R M O N CLIII.

The spirituality of the divine nature.

JOHN iv. 24.

God is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth.

THESE are the words of our SAVIOUR to SERM.
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the woman of Samaria, who was speaking to him of the difference between the Samaritans and the Jews concerning religion ; ver. 20. “ Our fathers worshipped in this mountain ; but ye say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.” CHRIST tells her, “ the time was coming, when the worshippers of God should neither be confined to that mountain, nor to Jerusalem ; but men should worship the father in spirit and in truth ;” when this carnal, and ceremonial,

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monial, and typical worship of God should be exalted into a more spiritual, a more real, and true, and substantial religion, which should not be confined to one temple, but should be universally diffused through the world. Now such a worship as this is most agreeable to the nature of God ; for he is a spirit, and “ those who worship him, must worship him in “ spirit and in truth.” In the words we have,

First, A proposition laid down, “ God is a spirit.”

Secondly, A corollary, or inference, deduced from it, “ they that worship him, must worship him in “ spirit and in truth.” I shall speak of the proposition, as that which concerns my present design ; and afterward speak something to the corollary, or inference, deduced from it, together with some other inferences drawn from this truth, by way of application.

First, “ That God is a spirit.” This expression is singular, and not to be paralleled again in the scripture ; indeed we have often mention made in the scripture of “ the spirit of God,” and “ the “ spirit of the Lord,” which signifies a divine power and energy ; and of “ the holy spirit,” signifying the third person in the Trinity ; God is called “ the “ God of the spirits of all flesh ;” Num. xvi. 22. xxvii. 16. much in the same sense, as he is called “ the father of spirits,” Heb. xii. 9. that is, the creator of the souls of men ; but we no where meet with this expression, or any other equivalent to it, that “ God is a spirit,” but only in this place ; nor had it been used here, but to prove, that the best worship of God, that which is most proper to him, is spiritual : so that the thing which our SAVIOUR here intends, is not to prove the spiritual nature of God, but that his worship ought to be spiritual ; nor indeed is there any necessity that it should have been

been any where said in scripture, that "GOD is a ^{S E R M.} spirit," it being the natural notion of a GOD ; no ^{CLIII.} more than it is necessary that it should be told us, that GOD is good, or that he is infinite, and eternal, and the like ; or that the scripture should prove to us the being of a GOD. All these are manifest by the light of nature, and if the scripture mentions them, it is *ex abundanti*, and it is usually in order to some farther purpose.

For we are to know, that the scripture supposeth us to be men, and to partake of the common notions of human nature, and therefore doth not teach us philosophy, nor solicitously instruct us in those things which are born with us ; but supposeth the knowledge of these, and makes use of these common principles and notions which are in us concerning GOD, and the immortality of our souls, and the life to come, to excite us to our duty, and quicken our endeavours after happiness. For I do not find that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, is any where expressly delivered in scripture, but taken for granted ; in like manner, that the scripture doth not solicitously instruct us in the natural notions which we have of GOD, but supposeth them known to us ; and if it mention them, it is not so much in order to knowledge as to practice ; and therefore we need not wonder that this expression, which doth set forth to us the nature of GOD, is but once used in scripture, and that brought in upon occasion, and for another purpose, because it is a thing naturally known. Plato says, that GOD is ἀσώματος, without body. In like manner Tully, *Nec enim Deus ipse qui intelligitur à nobis alio modo intelligi potest, nisi mens quædam soluta & libera, segregata ab omni concretionem mortali ;* " we cannot conceive of GOD, but as of a pure
" mind,

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“ mind, intirely free from all mortal composition or mixture.” And Plutarch after him, *νῆς ἔν ὁ θεός, χωριστὸν εἶδος, τέλει τὸ ἀμιγὲς πάσης ὕλης, μηδὲν παθεῖν* συμπεπλεγμένον, “ GOD is a mind, an abstract being, pure from all matter, and disintangled from whatever is passible or capable of suffering.”

So that natural light informing us that GOD is a spirit, there was no need why the scripture should inculcate this : it is an excellent medium or argument to prove that the worship of GOD should chiefly be spiritual ; and although it was not necessary that it should have been mentioned for itself, that is, to inform us of a thing which we could not otherwise know, yet the wisdom of GOD, by the express mention of this, seems to have provided against an error, which some weaker and grosser spirits might be subject to. You know GOD is pleased, by way of condescension and accommodation of himself to our capacity, to represent himself to us in scripture by human imperfections, and gives such descriptions of himself as if he had a body, and bodily members ; now to prevent any error or mistake that might be occasioned hereby, it seems very becoming the wisdom of GOD, somewhere in scripture expressly to declare the spiritual nature of GOD, that none through weakness or wilfulness might entertain gross apprehensions of him. In speaking to this proposition, I shall,

- I. Explain what is meant by a spirit.
- II. Endeavour to prove to you, that GOD is a spirit.
- III. Answer an objection or two.
- IV. Draw some inferences or corollaries from the whole.

I. For the explication of the notion of a spirit. I shall not trouble you with the strict philosophical notion

tion of it, as that it is such a substance as is penetrable, that is, may be in the same place with a body, and neither keep out the body, nor be kept out by it; and that the parts which we imagine in it cannot be divided, that is, really separated and torn from one another, as the parts of a body; but I will give you a negative description of it. A spirit is not matter, it doth not fall under any of our senses, it is that which we cannot see nor touch; it is not a body, not flesh, and blood, and bones; for so we find spirit in scripture opposed to flesh and body; Isa. xxxi. 3. "Their horses are flesh, and not spirit." So Luke xxiv. when CHRIST appeared to his disciples after his resurrection, they were terrified, and "supposed it had been a spirit," v. 39. But he said, "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see, for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." The most usual description of a spirit is by these negatives, it is not a body, hath not flesh and bones, doth not consist of matter, or of any thing that falls under our senses, that we can see or touch.

II. For the proof of this proposition, that "God is a spirit." This is not to be proved by way of demonstration; for there is nothing before God, or which can be a cause of him; but by way of conviction, by shewing the absurdity of the contrary. The first and most natural notion that we have of God, is, that he is a being every way perfect; and from this notion we must argue concerning the properties which are attributed to God, and govern all our reasonings concerning God by this; so that when any thing is said of God, the best way to know whether it be to be attributed to him, is to inquire whether it be a perfection or not; if it be, it belongs
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to him ; if it be not, it is to be removed from him ; and if any man ask, why I say God is so, or so, a spirit, or good, or just ? the best reason that can be given is, because these are perfections, and the contrary to these are imperfections. So that if I shew that it would be an imperfection for God to be imagined to be a body, or matter, I prove that he is a spirit, because it is an imperfection, that is, an absurdity to imagine him any thing else. To imagine God to be a body, or matter, doth evidently contradict four great perfections of God.

1. His infiniteness, or the immensity of his being. Grant me but these two things, that there is something in the world besides God, some other matter, as the heavens, the air, the earth, and all those things which we see ; and grant me that two bodies cannot be in the same place at once, and then it will evidently follow, that where-ever these are, God is shut out ; and consequently God should not be infinite, nor in all places ; and so much as there is of another matter in the world besides God, so many breaches there would be in the divine nature, so many *Hiatus's*.

2. The knowledge and wisdom of God. It cannot be imagined how mere matter can understand, how it can distinctly comprehend such variety of objects, and at one view take in past, present, and to come. Tully, speaking of spirits, saith, *Animorum nulla in terris origo inveniri potest* ; “ their original “ cannot be found upon earth ;” for, saith he, “ there is no material or bodily thing,” *Quod vim memoriae, mentis, cogitationis habeat, quod & praeterita teneat, & futura provideat, & complecti possit praesentia ; quae sola divina sunt* ; “ which hath the “ power of memory, of understanding, of thought ; “ which

“ which can retain things past, foresee things future, and comprehend things present ; all which powers are purely divine.”

3. Freedom and liberty. For the laws of matter are necessary, nor can we imagine any *αὐτεξέστικτον*, any arbitrary principle in it. This puzzled the Epicureans, as we see in Lucretius, “ for if (says he) all things move by certain and necessary laws, and there be a connexion of the parts of matter unto each other, so that if you move this, that must necessarily be moved ; whence, saith he, is liberty ?” *Unde est hæc inquam fati avulsa voluntas* ; “ whence is this principle of will, whose motions are not under any law of necessity.”

4. Goodness. This follows from the former ; for he is not good who does not know what he does, nor does it freely ; so that take away understanding and liberty, and you take away goodness ; now take away from God infiniteness, and knowledge, and liberty, and goodness, and you divest him of his glory ; you take away his most essential perfections. So that these great absurdities following from the supposing of God to be mere matter or body, we are to conceive of him as another kind of substance, that is, a spirit. So that I wonder that the author of the Leviathan, who doth more than once expressly affirm, that there can be nothing in the world, but what is material and corporeal, did not see that the necessary consequence of this position is to banish God out of the world. I would not be uncharitable, but I doubt, he did see it, and was content with the consequence, and willing the world should entertain it ; for it is so evident, that by supposing the divine essence to consist of matter the immensity of the divine nature is taken away ; and it is also

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so utterly unimaginable how mere matter should understand, and be endowed with liberty, and consequently with goodness, that I cannot but vehemently suspect the man who denies God to be a spirit, either to have a gross and faulty understanding, or a very ill-will against God, and an evil design to root out of the minds of men the belief of a God. I come in the

III. Place, to consider the objections.

1. Obj. Why then is God represented to us so often in scripture by the parts and members of mens bodies? Ans. I shall only say at present, that all these descriptions and representations of God are plainly made to comply with our weakness, by way of condescension and accommodation to our capacities.

2. Obj. How is it said that "man was made after the image of God," if God be a spirit, of which there can be no likeness nor resemblance? Ans. Man is not said to be "made after the image of God," in respect of the outward shape and features of his body; but in respect of the qualities of his mind, as holiness and righteousness, or of his faculties, as understanding and will; or which the text seems most to favour, in respect of his dominion and sovereignty over the creatures; for in the two former respects the angels are made after the image of God. Now this seems to be spoken peculiarly of men; Gen. i. 26. "Let us make man in our own image, after our own likeness, and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and the fowls of the air, &c."

IV. I come now to draw some inferences or corollaries from hence, and they shall be partly speculative, partly practical.

First,

First, speculative inferences.

1. That GOD is invisible. The proper object of sight is colour, and that ariseth from the various disposition of the parts of matter which cause several reflections of light ; now a spirit hath no parts nor matter, and therefore is invisible ; 1 Tim. i. 17. " Unto the eternal, immortal, invisible, the only " wife GOD." Heb. xi. 27. " He endured, as see- " ing him who is invisible ;" as seeing him by an eye of faith, who is invisible by an eye of sense. 1 Tim. vi. 16. " Whom no man hath seen, nor " can see."

When Moses and the elders of Israel are said to have seen GOD, and Jacob to have " seen him face " to face," Exod. ii. 9. Gen. xxxii. 30. it is meant of an angel covered with divine glory and majesty, as we shall see if we compare these with other texts. When Moses is said to have " spoken to him face to " face," that is familiarly ; and so Micaiah, 1 Kings xxii. 19. is said to have " seen GOD upon his throne, " and all Israel scattered up and down ;" this was in a vision. And it is promised, that in heaven we shall see GOD, that is, have a more perfect knowledge of him and full enjoyment ; as to " see good days," is to enjoy them. Those texts where it is said, " No man can see GOD and live," Exod. xxxiii. 20. and John i. 18. " No man hath seen GOD at " any time," do not intimate that GOD is visible, though we cannot see him ; but seeing is metaphorically used for knowing, and the meaning is, that in this life we are not capable of a perfect knowledge of GOD. A clear discovery of GOD to our understanding would let in joys into our souls, and create desires in us too great for frail mortality to bear.

2. That he is "the living God." Spirit and life are often put together in scripture.

3. That God is immortal. This the scripture attributes to him, 1 Tim. i. 17. "To the king immortal, invisible." 1 Tim. vi. 16. "Who only hath immortality." This also flows from God's spirituality; a spiritual nature hath no principles of corruption in it, nothing that is liable to perish, or decay, or die. Now this doth so eminently agree to God, either because he is purely spiritual, and immaterial, as possibly no creature is; or else because he is not only immortal in his own nature, but is not liable to be reduced to nothing by any other, because he hath an original and independent immortality, and therefore the apostle doth attribute it to him in such a singular and peculiar manner; "Who only hath immortality."

Secondly, practical inferences.

1. We are not to conceive of God as having a body, or any corporeal shape or members. This was the gross conceit of the Anthropomorphites of old, and of some Socinians of late, which they ground upon the gross and literal interpretation of many figurative speeches in scripture concerning God, as where it speaks of his face, and hand, and arm, &c. But we are very unthankful to God, who condescends to represent himself to us according to our capacities, if we abuse this condescension to the blemish and reproach of the divine nature. If God be pleased to stoop to our weakness, we must not therefore level him to our infirmities.

2. If God be a spirit, we are not to worship God by any image or sensible representation. Because "God is a spirit," we are not to liken him to any thing that is corporeal; we are not to represent him

him by "the likeness of any thing that is in heaven
"above," that is, of any birds; "or in the earth
"beneath," that is, of any beast; "or in the wa-
"ters under the earth," that is, of any fish; as it
is in the second commandment. For, as the prophet
tells us, there is nothing that we can liken God to;
Isa. xl. 18. "To whom will ye liken God? or
"what likeness will ye compare to him?" We de-
base his spiritual and incorruptible nature, when we
compare him to corruptible creatures; Rom. i. 22,
23. Speaking of the heathen idolatry, "Who pro-
"fessing themselves wise, became fools, and chang-
"ed the glory of the incorruptible God into an
"image made like to corruptible man, and to birds,
"and to four-footed beasts, and creeping things.
"They became fools;" this is the folly of idolatry,
to liken a spirit, which hath no bodily shape, to
things that are corporeal and corruptible. So that
however some are pleased to mince the matter, I
cannot see how the church of Rome, which worships
God by or towards some image or sensible represen-
tation, can be excused from idolatry; and the church
of England doth not without very just cause chal-
lenge the Romish church with it, and make it a
ground of separation from her.

3. If "God be a spirit," then we should wor-
"ship him in spirit and in truth." This is the in-
ference of the text, and therefore I shall speak a lit-
tle more largely of it; only I must explain what is
meant by "worshipping in spirit and in truth," and
shew you the force of this consequence, how it fol-
lows, that because "God is a spirit," therefore he
must be "worshipped in spirit and in truth."

1. For the explication of it. This word spirit is
sometimes applied to the doctrine of the gospel, and
so

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so it is opposed to letter, by which name the doctrine of Moses is called ; 2 Cor, iii. 6. " Who hath made us able ministers of the new testament, not of the letter, but of the spirit ;" not of the law which was written on tables of stone, but which CHRIST by his spirit writes in the hearts of believers. Sometimes to the worship of the gospel ; and so it is opposed to the flesh, Gal. iii. 3. " Having begun in the spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh ?" that is by the works of the ceremonial law, which is therefore called flesh, because the principal ceremony of it, circumcision, was made in the flesh, and because their sacrifices, a chief part of their worship, were of the flesh of beasts ; and because the greatest part of their ordinances, as washing, and the like, related to the body. Hence it is the apostle calls the worship of the Jews, " the law of a carnal commandment, Heb. vii. 16. and Heb. ix. 10. Carnal ordinances, speaking of the service of the law, " which," saith he, stood in meats, " and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances." Now in opposition to this carnal and ceremonial worship, we are to " worship God in the spirit." The worship of the Jews was most a bodily service ; but we are to give God a reasonable service, to serve him with the " spirit of our minds," as the apostle speaks ; instead of " offering the flesh of bulls and goats," we are to " consecrate ourselves" to the service of God : " this is a holy and acceptable sacrifice," or " reasonable service."

" And in truth." Either in opposition to the false worship of the Samaritans (as in spirit is opposed to the worship of the Jews) as our SAVIOUR tells the woman, that " they worshipped they knew not what ;" or (which I rather think) in opposition to the

the shadows of the law ; and so it is opposed, John
i. 17. " The law was given by Moses : but grace
" and truth came by JESUS CHRIST."

Not that the external service of GOD is here excluded, not that we are to shew no outward reverence to him : but that as under the law, the service of GOD was chiefly external and corporeal, so now it should chiefly be inward and spiritual ; the worship of GOD under the gospel should chiefly be spiritual and substantial, not a carnal, and bodily, and ceremonious devotion.

2dly. For the force of the consequence, it doth not lie in this, that just such as GOD is, such must our worship of him be ; for this would exclude all bodily and outward worship ; our worship of GOD must therefore be invisible, eternal, &c. for so is he ; and besides, the will of GOD seems rather to be the rule of his worship, than his nature : but the force of it is this, GOD is of a spiritual nature, and this is to be supposed to be his will, that our worship should be as agreeable to the object of it, as the nature of the creature who is to give it will bear ; now saith CHRIST to the woman, the Jews and the Samaritans limit their worship to a certain place, and it consists chiefly in certain carnal rites and ordinances ; but, saith he, though GOD hath permitted this for a time, because of the carnality and " hardness of their hearts," yet the time is coming, when a more spiritual, and solid, and substantial worship of GOD is to be introduced, which will be free from all particular places and rites, not tied to the temple, or to such external ceremonies, but consisting in the devotion of our spirits, even the inward frame and temper of our hearts ; all outward circumstances (excepting those of the two sacraments which are positive)

positive) being left by the gospel to as great a liberty, as natural necessity and decency will permit.

We must worship God, and therefore it is naturally necessary that we should do it somewhere, in some place ; now seeing somebody must determine this, it is most convenient that authority should determine it according to the conveniency of cohabitation. We must not be rude, nor do any thing that is naturally undecent in the worship of God ; this authority should restrain ; but farther than this, I doubt not but the gospel hath left us free ; and to this end, that the less we are tied to external observances, the more intent we should be upon the spiritual and substantial parts of religion, the conforming of ourselves to the mind and will of God, endeavouring to be like unto God, and to have our souls and spirits engaged in those duties we perform to him. So that our SAVIOUR's argument is this ; " God is a spirit," that is, " the most excellent nature and being," and therefore must be served with the best. We consist of body and soul, it is true, and we must serve him with our whole man ; but principally with our souls, which are the most excellent part of ourselves ; the service of our mind and spirit is the best we can perform, and therefore most agreeable to God, who is a spirit, and the best and most perfect being.

So that the inference is this, that if " God be " a spirit, we must worship him in spirit, and in " truth ;" our religion must be real, and inward, and sincere, and substantial ; we must not think to put off God with external observances, and with bodily reverence and attendance ; this we must give him, but we must principally regard that our service of him be reasonable, that is, directed by our understandings,

standings, and accompanied with our affections. Our religion must consist principally in a sincere love and affection to God, which expresseth itself in a real conformity of our lives and actions to his will; and when we make our solemn approaches to him, in the duties of his worship and service, we must perform all acts of outward worship to God with a pure and sincere mind; whatever we do in the service of God, we must "do it heartily as to the LORD." God is a pure spirit, present to our spirits, intimate to our souls, and conscious to the most secret and retired motions of our hearts: now because we serve the searcher of hearts, we must serve him with our hearts.

Indeed if we did worship God only to be seen of men, a pompous and external worship would be very suitable to such an end; but religion is not intended to please men, but God; and therefore it must be spiritual, and inward, and real.

And where-ever the external part of religion is principally regarded, and men are more careful to worship God with outward pomp and ceremony, than "in spirit and in truth," religion degenerates into superstition, and men embrace the shadow of religion, and let go the substance. And this the church of Rome hath done almost to the utter ruin of christianity; she hath clogged religion, and the worship of God, with so many rites and ceremonies, under one pretence or other, that the yoke of CHRIST is become heavier than that of Moses; and they have made the gospel a more carnal commandment than the law; and whatever Christians or churches are intent upon external rites and observances, to the neglect of the weightier parts of religion, regarding meats and drinks, &c. to the prejudice of righte-

ousness and peace, wherein the kingdom of God consists, they advance a religion as contrary to the nature of God, and as unsuitable to the genius and temper of the gospel as can be imagined.

It is an observation of Sir Edwin Sands, that as children are pleased with toys, so, saith he, it is a pitiful and childish spirit that is predominant in the contrivers and zealots of a ceremonious religion. I deny not, but that very honest and devout men may be this way addicted; but the wiser any man is, the better he understands the nature of God and of religion, the farther he will be from this temper.

A religion that consists in external and little things, doth most easily gain upon and possess the weakest minds, and whoever entertain it, it will enfeeble their spirits, and unfit them for the more generous and excellent duties of christianity. We have but a finite heat, and zeal, and activity; and if we let out much of it upon small things, there will be too little left for those parts of religion which are of greatest moment and concernment; if our heat evaporate in externals, the heart and vitals of religion will insensibly cool and decline.

How should we blush, who are Christians, that we have not learnt this easy truth from the gospel, which even the light of nature taught the heathen; *Cultus autem deorum est optimus itemque sanctissimus atque castissimus, plenissimusque pietatis, ut eos semper purâ, integrâ & incorruptâ mente & voce veneremur*, Tully.

“The best, the surest, the most chaste, and most
“devout worship of the gods, is that which is paid
“them with a pure, sincere, and uncorrupt mind,
“and words truly representing the thoughts of the
“heart. “*Compositum jus fasque animi, &c.*”
“Serve God with a pure, honest, holy frame of
“spirit,

“ spirit, bring a heart that is but generously honest,
“ and he will accept of the plainest sacrifice.”

And let me tell you, that the ceremonious worship of the Jews was never a thing in itself acceptable to GOD, or which he did delight in ; and though GOD was pleased with their obedience to the ceremonial law after it was commanded, yet antecedently he did not desire it ; but that which our SAVIOUR saith concerning the law of divorce, is true likewise of the ceremonial, that it was permitted to the Jews “ for the hardness of their hearts,” and for their proneness to idolatry. GOD did not command it so much by way of approbation, as by way of condescension to their weakness ; it was because of “ the hardness of their carnal hearts” that GOD brought them under “ the law of a carnal commandment,” as the apostle calls it. See Psal. li. 16, 17. Jer. vii. 21.

The reason why I have insisted so long upon this is, to let you understand what is the true nature of CHRIST’S religion, and to abate the intemperate heat and zeal which men are apt to have for external and indifferent things in religion. The sacrifices and rites of the Jews were very unagreeable and unsuitable to the nature of GOD, Psal. l. 13. “ will I “ eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?” Spirits neither eat nor drink ; it was a very unsuitable way of service to kill oxen and sheep for GOD ; and there is the same reason for all other rites, which either natural necessity or decency doth not require. Can any man in earnest think, that GOD, who is a spirit, is pleased with the pompous bravery and pageantry which affects our senses ? So little doth GOD value indifferent rites, that even the necessary external service of GOD, and outward reverence, where they are separated from “ spirit and truth,” from

real holiness and obedience to the indispensable laws of CHRIST, are so far from being acceptable to God, that they are abominable; nay, if they be used for a cloak of sin, or in opposition to real religion, and with a design to undermine it, GOD accounts such service in the number of the most heinous sins.

You, who spend the strength and vigour of your spirits about external things, whose zeal for or against ceremonies is ready to eat you up; you, who hate and persecute one another because of these things, and break the necessary and indispensable commands of love, as an indifferent and unnecessary ceremony, "go and learn what that means, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice," which our SAVIOUR doth so often inculcate, and that Rom. xiv. 17. "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink, &c." And study the meaning of this, "GOD is a spirit, and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit and in truth."

S E R M O N CLIV.

The immensity of the divine nature.

PSAL. cxxxix. 7, 8, 9, 10.

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right-hand shall hold me.

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THAT attribute of GOD which I last discoursed of is most absolute, and declares his essence most immediately; "the spirituality of the di-

“vine nature.” I shall in the next place speak of S E R M. CLIV. those which relate to the manner of his being, immensity and eternity, that is, the infiniteness of his essence, both in respect of space and duration; that the divine nature hath no limits of it's being, nor bounds of it's duration. I shall at the present speak to the first of these, his immensity, and that from these words which I here read to you, “Whither shall I go from thy spirit, &c.” The meaning of which is this, that God is a spirit, infinitely diffusing himself, present in all places, so that wherever I go, God is there; we cannot flee from his presence. “If I ascend into heaven, he is there; if I go down into the grave,” the place of silence and obscurity, “he is there;” (for that is the meaning of the expression) “if I make my bed in hell, if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me;” that is, if my motion should be as swift as that of the light, which when the sun riseth darts itself in an instant from one part of the world to another, over the earth and the sea, the remotest parts of the world which are unknown to us, yet would God be present to me in the motion, and all along as I go must I be led and upholden by him; so that all these expressions do but signify to us the immensity of God's essence, that his being is infinitely diffused and present in all places.

In speaking to this attribute of God's immensity, I shall first explain it to you a little.

Secondly, prove that it doth belong to him.

Thirdly, answer an objection or two that may be made against it.

Fourthly, draw some doctrinal inferences from it.

Fifthly,

Fifthly, make some use and improvement of it.
 First, for the explication of it. By the immensity of God, I mean, that his being hath no bounds or limits, but doth every way spread and diffuse itself beyond what we can imagine; so that you cannot define the presence of God by any certain place; so as to say, here he is, but not there; nor by any limits, so as to say, thus far his being reacheth, and no farther; but he is every where present after a most infinite manner, in the darkest corners and most private recesses; the most secret closet that is in the whole world, the heart of man, darkness and privacy cannot keep him out; the presence of another being, even of a body, which is the grossest substance, doth not exclude him; the whole world doth not confine him; but he fills all the space which we can imagine beyond this visible world, and infinitely more than we can imagine.

Secondly, for the proof of it, I shall attempt it,

I. From the natural notions, and dictates of our minds.

II. From scripture and divine revelation.

III. From the inconvenience of the contrary.

I. From the natural notions and dictates of our minds. We find that the heathen, by the light of nature, did attribute this perfection to God. Tully tells us, *De Nat. deor.* that Pythagoras thought, *Deum esse animam per naturam rerum omnem intentum & commeantem*, "That God is as it were a soul passing through and inspiring all nature." And in *l. 2. de leg.* that this was Thales his opinion which he commends, *Homines existimare oportere deos omnia cernere, deorum omnia esse plena*, "That men ought to believe, that the gods see all things, that all things are full of them." So Sen. epist.

95. *Ubique & omnibus præsto est.* "He is every
"where present and at hand," & de Benef. l. 4. SERM.
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*Quocunque te flexeris, ibi illum videbis occurrentem
tibi, nihil ab illo vacat, opus suum ipse implet;*
"Which way soever thou turnest thyself, thou shalt
"find him meeting thee, nothing is without him,
"he fills his own work." Not much differing
from the expression of the Psalmist here.

II. From scripture and divine revelation. I shall
instance in some remarkable places; 1 Kings viii.
27. "Behold, the heaven, and heaven of hea-
"vens cannot contain thee." Job xi. 7, 8, 9.
"Canst thou by searching find out God? canst
"thou find out the Almighty unto perfection?"
Isa. lxvi. 1. "Thus saith the LORD, behold, hea-
"ven is my throne, and the earth is my foot-stool:
"where is the house that ye build unto me? and
"where is the place of my rest?" Jer. xxiii. 23,
24. "Am I a God at hand, saith the LORD, and
"not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in se-
"cret places that I shall not see him, saith the LORD?
"do not I fill heaven and earth, saith the LORD?"
Amos ix. 2, 3. "Though they dig into hell, thence
"shall mine hand take them; though they climb
"up to heaven, thence will I bring them down.
"And though they hide themselves in the top of
"Carmel, I will search and take them out thence:
"and though they be hid from my sight in the bot-
"tom of the sea, thence will I command the serpent
"and he shall bite them." Acts xvii. 27, 28.
"Though he be not far from every one of us. For
"in him we live, and move, and have our being;
"as certain also of your own poets have said, for
"we are also his off-spring."

III. From

III. From the inconveniencies of the contrary.

And this is the most proper way of proving any of God's perfections; for as I have told you formerly, there being nothing before God, nor any cause of his being, his perfections cannot be proved by way of demonstration, but of conviction, by shewing the absurdity of the contrary. The first and most easy notion that we have of God, is, that he is a being that hath all perfection, and is free from all imperfections; now if I prove that the immensity of God's essence is a perfection, or which is the same, that the contrary is an imperfection, I do sufficiently prove the thing intended.

Now to suppose the divine essence to be limited, or confined, and his presence to be any where excluded, doth contradict both this necessary perfection of God, his universal providence; and the necessary duty of creatures, to worship and trust in him; and the voluntary manifestation and appearance of God, in the incarnation of JESUS CHRIST.

1. It contradicts the universal providence of God. The universal providence of God supposeth many perfections, viz. infinite knowledge, and infinite power, his omniscience and omnipotence, neither of which can be imagined without omnipresence. We find that all finite beings have a finite knowledge, and a finite power; and it cannot be conceived how infinite understanding and power can be founded any where else, than in an infinite essence. To have an infinite knowledge of all things, even those things which are most secret and hiddeh, to be able to do all things, to steer and govern the actions of all creatures, and to have a perfect care of them, seems to all the reason of mankind to require immediate presence.

2. It

2. It contradicts the necessary duty of the creature, which is to worship God, to depend upon him for every thing, and in every thing to acknowledge him. Now all worship of God is rendered vain, or at least uncertain, if God be not present to us to hear our prayers, to take notice of our wants, and receive our acknowledgments : it will much abate our confidence in God, and our fear to offend him, if we be uncertain whether he be present to us or not, whether he sees our actions or not.

3. It contradicts a voluntary manifestation and appearance of God in the incarnation of CHRIST. He that supposeth God not to be every where present by his essence, must in all reason confine his presence to heaven, and suppose him to be present elsewhere only by his vertue and power : but if this were so, how could the divinity be essentially united to the human nature of CHRIST, which was here upon earth ? How “ is God with us ; ” how does “ he “ pitch his tabernacle amongst men ; ” if his essential presence be confined to heaven ?

Thirdly, I come to answer objections against this doctrine.

There are two objections against this.

1. From reason.

2. From scripture.

1. Obj. Reason will be ready to suggest, that this is a disparagement to the divine nature, to tie his presence to this vile dunghil of the earth, and sordid sink of hell. This is a gross apprehension of God, and a measuring of him by ourselves. Indeed if we look upon God as capable of injury, and suffering, and offence, from the contagion of any thing here below, as we are, then indeed there were some strength in this objection : but he is a blessed and pure being,

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being, *Mens segregata ab omni concretionē mortali*,
 “ A mind free from all mortal composition or mixture ;” Tully. Μηδενὶ παθητῷ συμπεπλεγμένον,
 “ disentangled from every thing passible ;” as Plut.
 Those things that are nauseous to our senses, do not affect him: darkness is uncomfortable to us, but
 “ the darkness and the light are all one to him.”
 Wickedness may “ hurt a man,” or “ the son of
 “ man ;” but “ if we multiply our transgressions,
 “ we do nothing to GOD,” as Elihu speaks, Job xxxv. 6. Nothing can disquiet or discompose his happy and blessed nature, but he converseth here in this dark and troubled world with less danger or disturbance, or any impure contagion, than the sunbeams.

2. Object. Does not the scripture tell us, that
 “ GOD sits in the heavens, and “ dwells on high,”
 that “ heaven is his throne,” and that “ it is the city
 “ of the great GOD ?” Doth not the LORD’s prayer
 teach us to say, “ Our father which art in heaven ?”
 Is he not said to “ look down from heaven,” and
 “ to hear in heaven his dwelling-place ?” Is it not
 said, that “ he doth not dwell in temples made with
 “ hands ?” And does not Solomon, 1 Kings viii.
 27. put it as a strange question, “ will GOD indeed
 “ dwell on the earth ?” Is he not said to come
 down and draw near to us, and to be afar off from
 us ? Now how does this agree with immensity and
 omnipresence ?

For answer to this, I must distinguish the presence
 of GOD. There is, 1st, his glorious presence, that
 is, such a presence of GOD as is accompanied with
 an extraordinary manifestation of his glory, and
 that is especially and chiefly confined to heaven,
 in respect of which it is called his seat, and throne,
 and

and "the habitation of his glory." Some degree of this was in the temple, which is the reason of Solomon's admiration, "will God indeed dwell on earth?"

2dly, There is his gracious presence, which discovers itself by miraculous effects of his favour, and goodness, and assistance, and thereby he is said to "dwell in the hearts" of good men, and "with them that are of an humble and contrite spirit," Isa. lvii. 15. and in respect of this he is said to "draw near to us," to "look down upon us;" and in respect of the absence of this to be "far from us."

3dly, There is his essential presence, which is equally and alike in all places; and this is not excluded by those former expressions which the scripture useth to denote to us the glorious and gracious presence of God.

Fourthly, to make some inferences. I will mention only such as the scripture here takes notice of, speaking of God's immensity.

I. Inf. That God is a spirit. This necessarily flows from his immensity; for if the essence of God be every where diffused, the divine nature must be spiritual, otherwise it could not be in the same place where body and matter is, but must be shut out of the world. But this I spoke more largely to, in my discourse of God's being a spirit. This the Psalmist observes here, "Where shall I go from thy spirit?" If he were not a spirit, we might "go from him," and "hide ourselves from his presence."

II. Inf. That God is incomprehensible, that which is infinite cannot be measured and comprehended by that which is finite; and this also the Psalmist takes notice of, in the verse before my text, "Such

“ knowledge is too wonderful for me, it is high, I cannot attain it.”

III. Inf. That God is omniscient, if God be every where, then he knows all things, yea even the hidden things of darkness, the secrets of our hearts ; nothing can be hidden from an infinite eye ; he is present to our thoughts, intimate to our hearts and reins ; this the Psalmist takes notice of, 1, 2, 3, 4, and 12 verses.

IV. Inf. That God is omnipotent. “ He can do all things.” Distance limits the power of creatures, and makes “ their hands short ;” but God is every where, nothing is out of his reach ; and this also the Psalmist intimates in the text, v. 10. “ Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand hold me.”

Fifthly, the use and improvement I shall make of this, shall be,

1. To awaken our fear of him.

2. To encourage our faith and confidence in him.

1. To awaken our fear of him. The consideration of God’s presence should awaken in us a fear of reverence. The presence of an earthly majesty will awe our spirits, and compose us to reverence ; yea the presence of a wise and good man ; how much more should the presence of the great, glorious, the wise, and the holy, and the just God strike an awe upon our spirits ? Where-ever we are God is with us, we always converse with him, and live continually in his presence ; now a heathen could say, *cum Diis verecundè agendum*, “ We must behave ourselves modestly because we are in the presence of God.”

And it should awaken in us a fear to offend God, and a fear of the divine displeasure for having offended him. Fear is the most wakeful passion in the soul of man, and is the first principle that is wrought upon

upon in us from the apprehensions of a deity ; it flows immediately from the principle of self-preservation which God hath planted in every man's nature ; we have a natural dread and horror for every thing that can hurt us, and endanger our being or happiness ; now the greatest danger is from the greatest power, for where we are clearly over-matched, we cannot hope to make opposition nor resistance with security and success, to rebel with safety : now he that apprehends God to be near him, and present to him, believes such a being to stand by him as is possessor of an infinite and irresistible power, and will vindicate all contempt of the divine majesty, and violation of his laws. If we believe God to be always present with us, " Fear will continually take hold of us," and we shall say of every place, as Jacob did of Bethel, " Surely God is in this place, how dreadful is this place ?" When we have at any time provoked God, if we believe the just God is at hand to revenge himself, and if we believe " the power of his anger," we shall say with David, Psal. lxxvi. 7. " Thou even thou art to be feared, and who may stand before thee when thou art angry ?" Psal. cxix. 120. " My flesh trembleth because of thee, and I am afraid of thy judgments."

Sinners consider this, " It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God," and every time you sin, you are within his reach. Let then the consideration of God's presence deter us from sin, and quicken us to our duty. The eye and presence of a superior will lay a great restraint upon men ; the eye of our prince, our master, or our father, will make us afraid or ashamed to do any thing that is foolish or unseemly : And will we do that under the eye of God, which we should blush

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to do before a grave or wise person, yea before a child or a fool? Did but men live under this apprehension, that GOD is present to them, that an holy and all-seeing eye beholds them, they would be afraid to do any thing that is vile and wicked, to profane and pollute GOD's glorious name, by a trifling use of it in customary swearing and cursing. Whenever you sin, you affront GOD to his face; and provoke omnipotent justice, which is at the door, and ready to break in upon you.

And the consideration of this should especially deter us from secret sins. This is the use the Psalmist here makes of it. If we believe that "GOD searcheth us and knows us, that he knows our down-sitting, and our up-rising, and understands our thoughts, afar off, that he compasseth our path, and our lying down, and is acquainted with all our ways, that there is not a word in our tongue, but he knows it altogether, that he hath beset us behind and before, that the darkness hideth not from him, but the night shineth as the day, and the darkness and light are both alike;" I say, if we believe this, how should we live in an awful sense of the majesty which is always above us, and before us, and about us, and within us, and is as inseparable from us, as we are from ourselves, whose eye is upon us from the beginning of our lives to the end of our days! did men believe that GOD is always with them, that his eye pierceth the darkness, and sees through all those clouds with which they hide and muffle themselves, and pries into the most secret recesses of their hearts, how would this check and restrain them from "devising mischief in their hearts, or in their bed-chamber?" The holy presence, and the pure eye of GOD would be to us a thousand
times

times more than to have our father, or our master, or our prince, or him whom we most revere, to stand by us. Did but men *representare sibi Deum*, “make God present to them,” by living under a continual sense of his presence, they would, as the expression of the wise man is, “be in the fear of the LORD all day.” *Magna spes peccatorum tollitur, si peccatoris testis adsistat: aliquem habeat animus quem vereatur, cujus auctoritate etiam secretum suum sanctius facit*; “The main hope of sinners is to remain undiscovered, let but somebody be privy to their designs, and they are utterly disappointed; it is fit for the mind of a man to have an awe of some being, whose authority may render even it’s privacy more solemn.” This is the character of wicked men, Psal. lxxxvi. 14. “that they have not God before their eyes.” One great cause of all the wickedness, and violence, and looseness that is upon the earth, is, they do not believe that God is near them, and stands by them.

And as the consideration of God’s presence should deter us from sin, so it should quicken and animate us to our duty. It is ordinarily a great encouragement to men to acquit themselves handsomely, to have the eyes of men upon them, especially of those whose applause and approbation they value. God alone is *amplum theatrum*, he is a greater theatre than the world, and it should be more to us that he stands by us, than if the eyes of all the world were fixed upon us. Seneca adviseth it as an excellent means to promote virtue, to propound to ourselves, and set before our eyes some eminently virtuous person, as Cato or Lælius, *ut sic tanquam illo spectante vivamus, & omnia tanquam illo vidente faciamus*: “That we may live just as if he were looking upon us, and do

“do all things just as if he beheld us.” How much greater incitement will it be to us, to think that God looks upon us, and sees us, and really stands by us, than faintly to imagine the presence of Lælius or Cato?

This should have an influence upon all the duties we perform, and the manner of performing them, that we do it to him who stands by us, and is familiarly acquainted with us, and is more intimate to us than we are to ourselves. This Cic. in l. 2. de leg. looks upon as a great principle of religion, *sit igitur hoc persuasum civibus, & qualis quisque sit, quid agat, quid in se admittat, quâ mente, quâ pietate religiones colat, deos intueri, & piorum impiorumque rationem habere*: “Let men be thoroughly persuaded of this, “that the gods observe, both the disposition and “the actions of every particular man, what he consents to, what he allows himself in, particularly “with what meaning, with what degree of inward “devotion he performs his religious worship; and “that they distinguish between the pious and the “impious.”

2. To encourage our faith and confidence in him. When we are in straits, and difficulties, and dangers, God is with us; when trouble is near to us, God is not far from us; where-ever we are, how remote soever from friends and companions, we cannot be banished from God’s presence; if we dwell “beyond the utmost parts of the sea, there his hand “leads us, and his right-hand holds us. Psal. xvi. “8. I have set the LORD always before me; because he is at my right-hand, I shall not be moved.” The consideration of God’s presence is the great stay and support of our faith, Psal. xlv. 1, 2. “God is our refuge and strength, a very present “help

“ help in trouble ; therefore will not we fear though
 “ the earth be removed, and though the mountains
 “ be carried into the midst of the sea.” In the
 greatest commotions, and the most eminent and
 threatening dangers, this should charm and allay our
 fears, that “ God is a present help.”

This was the support of Moses his faith in his suf-
 ferings, as the apostle tells us, Heb. xi. 27. “ He
 “ endured, as seeing him who is invisible.”

To conclude all, whenever we are under any pres-
 sure or trouble, we should rebuke our own fears, and
 challenge our anxious thoughts, with David, Psal.
 xlii. 11. “ Why art thou cast down, O my soul ?
 “ and why art thou so disquieted within me ? trust
 “ still in God ;” believe that God is with thee, and
 that omnipotent goodness stands by thee, who can
 and will support thee, and relieve thee, and deliver
 thee when it seems best to his wisdom.

S E R M O N CLV.

The eternity of God.

PSAL. xc. 2.

*Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou
 hadst formed the earth and the world, even from
 everlasting to everlasting thou art God.*

THE immensity and eternity of God are SERM.
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 those attributes which relate to his nature, or
 manner of being. Having spoken of the former, I
 proceed to consider the latter, from these words.

The title of this Psalm is the “ prayer of Moses,

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“ the

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“ the man of God.” He begins his prayer with the acknowledgment of God’s providence to his people from the beginning of the world ; LORD, thou “ hast been our dwelling place from all generations ; “ in generation and generation ;” so the Hebrew. He was well acquainted with the history of the world, and the providence of God from the beginning of it, and as if he had spoken too little of God, in saying, that his providence had been exercised in all the ages of the world, he tells us here in the text, that he was before the world, and he made it, he was from all eternity, and should continue to all eternity the same. “ Before the mountains were brought forth ;” the most firm and durable parts of the world ; the most eminent and conspicuous ; “ or “ ever thou had’st formed the earth and the world ;” before any thing was created ; “ from everlasting to “ everlasting thou art God.” In speaking of this attribute, I shall

First, give you the explication of it.

Secondly, endeavour to prove that it doth belong to God, and ought to be attributed to the divine nature.

Thirdly, Draw some corollaries from the whole.

First, For the explication of it. Eternity is a duration without bounds or limits : now there are two limits of duration, beginning and ending ; that which hath always been is without beginning ; that which always shall be is without ending. Now we may conceive of a thing always to have been, and the continuance of it’s being now to cease, though there be no such thing in the world : and there are some things which have had a beginning of their being, but shall have no end, shall always continue, as the angels, and spirits of men. The first of these the

“ school-

schoolmen call eternity *à parte ante*, that is, duration without beginning; this latter eternity *à parte post*, a duration without ending: But eternity absolutely taken comprehends both these, and signifies an infinite duration which had no beginning, nor shall have any end; so that when we say God is eternal, we mean, that he always was and shall be for ever; that he had no beginning of life, nor shall have any end of days; but that, "he is from everlasting to everlasting," as it is here in the text.

It is true indeed, that as to God's eternity *a parte ante*, as to his having always been, the scripture doth not give us any solicitous account of it; it only tells us in general, that God was "before the world was," and that "he created it;" it doth not descend to gratify our curiosity, in giving us any account of what God did before he made the world, or how he entertained himself from all eternity; it doth not give us any distinct account of his infinite duration; for that had been impossible for our finite understandings to comprehend; if we should have ascended upward millions of ages, yet we should never have ascended to the top, never have arrived at the beginning of infinity; therefore the scripture, which was wrote to instruct us in what was necessary, and not to satisfy our curiosity, tells us this, that God was "from everlasting, before the world was made, and that he laid the foundations of it."

So that by the eternity of God you are to understand "the perpetual continuance of his being, without beginning or ending."

I shall not trouble you with the inconsistent and unintelligible notions of the schoolmen; that it is *duratio tota simul*, in which we are not to conceive

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CLV.

any succession, but to imagine it an instant. We may as well conceive the immensity of God to be a point, as his eternity to be an instant ; and according to our manner of conceiving, we must necessarily suppose the immensity of God to be an infinite expansion of his essence, a presence of it to all places, and imaginable space ; so must we suppose the eternity of God to be a perpetual continuance, co-existent to all imaginable succession of ages. Now how can that be together, which must necessarily be imagined to be co-existent to successions, let them that can conceive.

Secondly, For the proof of this, I shall attempt it two ways.

I. From the dictates of natural light and reason.

II. From scripture and divine revelation.

I. From the dictates of natural reason. This attribute of God is of all other least disputed among the philosophers ; indeed all agree that God is a perfect and happy being, but wherein that happiness and perfection consists, they differ exceedingly ; but all agree that God is eternal, and are agreed what eternity is, viz. “ a boundless duration :” and however they did attribute a beginning to their heroes and demons, whence come the genealogies of their gods ; yet the supreme God, they looked upon as without beginning ; and it is a good evidence, that this perfection doth clearly belong to God, that Epicurus, who had the lowest and meanest conceptions of God, and robbed him of as many perfections, as his imperfect reason would let him, yet is forced to attribute this to him. Tully de Nat. Deor. lib. 1. saith to the Epicureans, *ubi igitur vestrum beatum & æternum quibus duobus verbis significatis Deum?* “ where then is your happy and eternal being, by
“ which

“ which two epithets you express God ?” And S E R M. CLV.
 Lucretius, who hath undertaken to represent to the world the doctrine of Epicurus, gives this account of the divine nature.

*Omnis enim per se divûm natura necesse est,
 Immortali ævo summa cum pace fruatur.*

“ It is absolutely necessary to the nature of the gods,
 “ to pass an eternity in profound peace and quiet.”

The poets who had the wildest notions of God, yet they constantly give them the title of ἀθάνατοι; the heathen never mention the name of God, without this attribute, *dii immortales* ! immortal gods ! was their ordinary exclamation ; and they swear constantly by this attribute, *deos testor immortales* ; and to mention no more, Tully saith expressly, *Nos Deum nisi sempiternum intelligere qui possumus ?* “ How can we conceive of God, but as an eternal “ being ?”

Now the reason of this is evident, because it would be the greatest imperfection we could attribute to his being ; and the more perfect his being were otherwise, the greater imperfection would it be for such a being to die ; so excellent a nature to cease to be ; it would be an infinite abasement to all his other perfections ; his power, and wisdom, and goodness, that these should all be perishing. Nay it would hinder several of his perfections, and contradict their very being : his self-existence ; had he not always been, he had not been of himself ; his necessary existence ; for that is not necessarily, which may at any time not be, or cease to be what it is ; and it would much abate the duty of the creature ; we could not have that assurance of his promise, and that security of the recompence of the next life, if the continuance of his being,

S E R M. being, who should be the dispenser of them, were
 CLV. uncertain.

Now these absurdities and inconveniencies following from the denial of this perfection to God, is sufficient evidence that it belongs to him; for I told you the perfections of God cannot be proved by way of demonstration, but only by way of conviction, by shewing the absurdity of the contrary.

II. From scripture and divine revelation. There are innumerable places to this purpose which speak of the eternity of God directly, and by consequence: by consequence those words, 2 Pet. iii. 8. "One day with the LORD is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day;" which words, however interpreters have troubled themselves about them, being afraid of a contradiction in them, yet the plain meaning of them is this, that such is the infinite duration of God, that all measures of time bear no proportion to it; for that this is the plain meaning, appears by this xcth Psalm, out of which they are cited, "for a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday, when it is past, and as a watch in the night," that is as the time past, as a few hours slept away, for that is the meaning of "a watch in the night," that is as nothing; now St. Peter's conversion of the words, "one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" only signifies this, that the longest duration of time is so inconsiderable to God, that it is as the shortest, that is, bears no proportion to the eternity of God.

But directly, the scripture frequently mentions this attribute, he is called the "everlasting God," Gen. xxi. 33. "The eternal God," Deut. xxxiii. 27. and which is to the same purpose, "he that inhabiteth

"inhabith eternity," Isa. lvii. 15. And this as ^{S E R M.}
it is attributed to him in respect of his being, so in ^{CLV}
respect of all his other perfections, Psal. ciii. 17.

"The mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to
"everlasting. Rom. i. 20." "his eternal power."
1 Tim. i. 17. "The king eternal." Those doxo-
logies which the scripture useth are but acknow-
ledgments of this attribute. "Blessed be the LORD
"for ever and ever," Neh. ix. 5. "To whom be
"glory, and honour, and dominion, for ever and
"ever, Gal. i. 5. and in many other places.

Hither we may refer all those places which speak
of him as without beginning, Psal. xciii. 2. "Thou
"art from everlasting." Mich. v. 2. "Whose go-
"ings forth have been from everlasting." Hab. i.
12. "Art not thou from everlasting ! O LORD!"
And those which speak of the perpetual continuance
of his duration ; Psal. cii. 24, 25, 26, 27. "Thy
"years are throughout all generations, of old thou
"hast laid the foundations of the earth, and the
"heavens are the work of thy hands ; they shall
"perish, but thou shalt endure ; yea all of them
"shall wax old like a garment, and as a vesture
"shalt thou change them, and they shall be chang-
"ed ; but thou art the same, and thy years shall
"have no end."

And those which speak of him as the first and
the last ; Isa. xliii. 10. "Before me there was no
"God formed, neither shall there be any after me.
"I am the first, and I am the last, and besides me
"there is no God." And to mention no more, those
which speak of his being, as co-existent to all dif-
ference of time, past, present, and to come, Rev. i.
8. "I am alpha, and omega, the beginning, and
"the ending, saith the LORD, which is, and which
"was, and which is to come."

Thirdly,

The eternity of God.

Thirdly, I shall from hence draw,

I. Some doctrinal corollaries.

II. Some practical inferences

I. Doctrinal corollaries, that you may see how the perfections of God depend one upon another, and may be deduced one from another.

1. Corol. From the eternity of God we may infer that he is of himself. That which always is, can have nothing before it to be a cause of it's being.

2. Corol. We may hence infer the necessity of his being. It is necessary every thing should be, when it is ; now that which is always is absolutely necessary, because always so.

3. Corol. The immutability of the divine nature; for being always, he is necessarily, and being necessarily, he cannot but be what he is ; a change of his being is as impossible as a cessation. Therefore the Psalmist puts his immutability and eternity together. Psal. cii. 27. " But thou art the same, and thy years shall have no end."

II. By way of practical inference or application.

1. The consideration of God's eternity may serve for the support of our faith. This Moses here useth as a ground of his faith ; " LORD, thou hast been our dwelling-place, in all generations, before the mountains were brought forth, &c." Psal. lxii. 8. " Trust in him at all times, ye people." His immensity is an argument why all should trust in him, he is a present help to all ; and why they should trust in him at all times, his eternity is an argument, Deut. xxxiii. 27. " The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms." There are two attributes which are the proper objects of our faith and confidence, God's goodness, and his power, both these are eternal ;

" The

“ The goodness of the LORD endureth for ever,” SERM.
as it is frequently in the Psalms : and his power is CLV.
eternal ; the apostle speaks of his eternal power,
as well as godhead ; Rom. i. 20. Isa. xxvi. 4.
“ Trust ye in the LORD for ever, for in the LORD
“ Jehovah is everlasting strength.” Isa. xl. 28.
“ The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of
“ the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is
“ weary.”

We cannot trust in men, because there is nothing
in man to be a foundation of our confidence ; his
good will towards us may change, his power may
faint, and he may grow weary ; or if these con-
tinue, yet they that have a mind and a power to
help us, themselves may fail ; therefore the Psalmist
useth this consideration of mens mortality, to take
us off from confidence in man, Psal. cxlvi. 3, 4.
“ Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of
“ man, in whom there is no help ; his breath go-
“ eth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that very
“ day his thoughts perish.” Isa. ii. 22. “ Cease ye
“ from man, whose breath is in his nostrils ; for
“ wherein is he to be accounted of ? ” The greatest
of the sons of men are but “ lying refuges to the
“ everlasting God ; ” they are but “ broken reeds
“ to the rock of ages.”

And this may support our faith, not only in refe-
rence to our own condition for the future, but in re-
ference to our posterity, and the condition of God’s
church to the end of the world. When we die we
may leave ours and the church in his hands, who
lives for ever, and reigns for ever. The enemies
of God’s church, and those who have the most ma-
licious designs against it, whatever share they may
have in the affairs of the world, they can but do-

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" The

“ The goodness of the LORD endureth for ever,” SERM.
as it is frequently in the Psalms : and his power is CLV.
eternal ; the apostle speaks of his eternal power,
as well as godhead ; Rom. i. 20. Isa. xxvi. 4.
“ Trust ye in the LORD for ever, for in the LORD
“ Jehovah is everlasting strength.” Isa. xl. 28.
“ The everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of
“ the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is
“ weary.”

We cannot trust in men, because there is nothing
in man to be a foundation of our confidence ; his
good will towards us may change, his power may
faint, and he may grow weary ; or if these con-
tinue, yet they that have a mind and a power to
help us, themselves may fail ; therefore the Psalmist
useth this consideration of mens mortality, to take
us off from confidence in man, Psal. cxlvi. 3, 4.
“ Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of
“ man, in whom there is no help ; his breath go-
“ eth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that very
“ day his thoughts perish.” Isa. ii. 22. “ Cease ye
“ from man, whose breath is in his nostrils ; for
“ wherein is he to be accounted of ? ” The greatest
of the sons of men are but “ lying refuges to the
“ everlasting God ; ” they are but “ broken reeds
“ to the rock of ages.”

And this may support our faith, not only in refe-
rence to our own condition for the future, but in re-
ference to our posterity, and the condition of God’s
church to the end of the world. When we die we
may leave ours and the church in his hands, who
lives for ever, and reigns for ever. The enemies
of God’s church, and those who have the most ma-
licious designs against it, whatever share they may
have in the affairs of the world, they can but do-

mineer for a while, they must "die, and that very
" day their thoughts perish: but thy throne, O
" God, is for ever and ever."

2. For the encouragement of our obedience. We serve the God who can give us an everlasting reward. The reward of the next life is called "eternal life," "an eternal weight of glory," 2 Cor. iv. 17. "Eternal salvation," Heb. v. 9. "An eternal inheritance," Heb. ix. 15. That place where good men shall be rewarded is called, "Everlasting habitations," Luke xvi. 9. "A house eternal in the heavens," 2 Cor. v. 1. As the promise of our future reward is founded in the goodness of God, and the greatness of it in his power, so the duration of it in his eternity. Now what an encouragement is this to us, that we serve him and suffer for him who lives for ever, and will make us happy for ever? When we serve the great men of this world, though we be secure of their affection, yet we are uncertain of their lives; and this discourageth many, and makes men worship the rising sun, and many times takes off mens eyes from the king, to his successor: but he that serves God, serves "the king everlasting," as the apostle calls him, who will live to dispense rewards to all those who are faithful to him.

3. For the terror of wicked men. The sentence which shall be past upon men at the day of judgment, is called "Eternal judgment," Heb. vi. 2. because it decides mens eternal state; the punishment that shall follow this sentence, which shall pass upon the wicked, is called, "Everlasting punishment," Matth. xxv. 36. "Everlasting fire," Matth. xxv. 41. "Everlasting destruction," 2 Theff. ii. 9. "The vengeance of eternal fire," Jude 7. "The
" smoke

“ smoke of the bottomless pit,” is said, “ to ascend for ever and ever,” Rev. xiv. 11. and the wicked “ to be tormented day and night, for ever and ever, Rev. xx. 10. Now as the punishment of wicked men is founded in the justice of God ; and the greatness of it in his power ; so the perpetuity and continuance of it in his eternity. The apostle saith, Heb. x. 31. “ It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God ;” because he that “ lives for ever can punish for ever ;” as the eternal demerit of sin feeds, and animates, and keeps alive the never dying worm, so the wrath of the eternal God blows up the eternal flame.

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How should this awaken in us a fear of the eternal God ! Sinners, what a folly is it, for “ the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season,” to incense that justice which will punish and torment you for ever ! As good men shall have the everlasting God for their reward, and their happiness ; so wicked men shall have him for their judge and avenger.

We fear the wrath of men, whose power is short, and “ whose breath is in their nostrils,” who can afflict but a little, and for a little while. Dost thou fear “ man that shall die, and the son of man that shall be made as grass ?” and is not the wrath of the eternal God much more terrible ? Luke xii. 4, 5. And I say unto you, my friends, be not afraid “ of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do : but I will forewarn you whom ye shall fear ; fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell, yea, I say unto you, fear him.” The wrath of man is despicable, because it hath bounds and limits ; the fury of man can but reach to the body, it can go

no farther ; it expires with this life ; it cannot follow us beyond the grave : but the wrath of the eternal God doth not only reach the body, but the soul ; it is not confined to this life, but pursues us to the other world, and extends itself to all eternity.

“ Fear him, who after he hath killed, hath power to cast into hell,” that is, to inflict eternal torments ; “ yea, I say unto you, fear him.”

S E R M O N CLVI.

The incomprehensibleness of God.

JOB xi. 7.

Canst thou by searching find out God ? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection ?

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IN treating of the properties and perfections of God, I shall at present consider that which results from the infinite excellency of his nature and perfection, compared with the imperfection of our understandings, which is commonly called, the incomprehensibleness of God. This you have expressed here in the words of Zophar, “ Canst thou by searching find out God ?” &c.

There is no great difficulty in the words ; “ Canst thou by searching find out God,” *potesne pervestigare intima Dei*, so Castalio translates it ; dost thou know God intimately, and thoroughly within and without ? Canst thou pierce into the centre of his perfections,

perfections, and dive into the bottom of them? And, SERM.
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“Canst thou find out the Almighty to perfection?”

Canst thou find out the Almighty, *usque ad ultima*, to the very last and utmost of him? so as thou canst say after a thorough search and enquiry, there is no perfection in God beyond this, there is nothing of him now that remains to be known; this he is, and no other; that he is, and no otherwise; this he can do, and no more; hither doth his knowledge, and power, and wisdom reach, and no farther.

“Canst thou do this?” These interrogations have the force of a vehement negation; as if he had said, “No, thou canst not; God is unsearchable, he is “incomprehensible.”

The two questions in the text seem to be only two several expressions of the same thing. The first question is undoubtedly general, concerning the nature and perfections of God in general; “Canst thou by searching find out God?” Canst thou by the most diligent search and enquiry come to a perfect knowledge and understanding of him?

The second question may seem to be a particular instance to the general truth implied in the first question; he seems to instance in his power; as if he had said, “God is unsearchable,” and then had instanced in a particular perfection, “the power of God, canst thou by searching find out God?” Thou canst not comprehend the divine nature and perfections in general; “Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection;” Consider particularly his power, and see if thou canst know the utmost of that. But I rather think, that the latter question is altogether the same in sense with the former; and that the attribute of Almighty, which is here given to God, is used by way of description, and not intended

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tended by way of instance. "Canst thou find out
"the Almighty," that is, God, "unto perfection?"
Which way soever we take the words, it is not much
material; we may ground this observation upon
them:

That God is incomprehensible.

This term or attribute is a relative term, and speaks
a relation between an object and a faculty, between
God and a created understanding; so that the mean-
ing of it is plainly this, that no created understand-
ing can comprehend God, that is, have a perfect and
exact knowledge of him, such a knowledge as is
adequate to the perfection of the object. Or thus,
the nature and perfections of God are above the un-
derstanding of any of his creatures; it is only his
own infinite understanding that can frame a perfect
idea of his own perfection. God knows himself, his
own understanding comprehends his own perfections:
but he is "incomprehensible to his creatures."

Indeed, there is nothing more obvious than God;
for "he is not far from every one of us, in him we
"live, and move, and have our being;" there
needs no great search to find out there is a God;
"an eternal power and deity are clearly seen in the
"things which are made," as the apostle tells us;
but the manner of the being, and properties, and
perfections of this God, these cannot be compre-
hended by a finite understanding. I shall prove the
doctrine, and then apply it.

First, For the proof it. I will attempt it these
three ways.

- I. By way of instance, or induction of particulars.
 - II. By way of conviction.
 - III. By giving the clear reason of it.
- I. By way of instance. And I shall give you in-
stances

stances both on the part of the object, and of the ^{S E R M.} subject; or the persons who are capable of knowing ^{CLVI.} God in any degree.

I. On the part of the object. The nature of God, the excellency and perfection of God, the works and ways of God are above our thoughts and apprehensions. The nature of God; it is vast and infinite, Job xxxvi. 26. "God is great, and we know him not." Job xxxvii. 23. "Touching the Almighty, we cannot find him out." Psal. cxlv. 3. "His greatness is unsearchable."

The excellencies and perfections of God; his immensity, 2 Chron. ii. 6. "The heaven of heavens cannot contain him:" The eternity of his duration, "from everlasting to everlasting he is God." We cannot imagine any limits of his presence, nor bounds of his duration: the infiniteness of his knowledge, Psal. cxlvii. 5. "His understanding is infinite." When we think of the wisdom and knowledge of God, our best way is to fall into admiration, Rom. xi. 35. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"

Whereas the scripture speaks of those perfections of God, which the creatures do in some measure and degree partake of, as his goodness, and power, and wisdom, and holiness, and immortality, it attributes them in such a peculiar and divine manner to God, as doth exclude and shut out the creature from any claim or share or title to them, Matt. xix. 16, 17. "Why callest thou me good; there is none good but one, that is God." 1 Tim. vi. 15, 16. "Who is the blessed and only potentate, who only hath immortality." 1 Tim. i. 17. "The only wise God," Rev. xv. 4. "For thou only art holy." In so inconceivable a manner doth God
possess

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possess these perfections which he communicates, and we can only understand them as he communicates them, and not as he possesses them; so that when we consider any of these divine perfections, we must not frame notions of them contrary to what they are in the creature, nor must we limit them by what they are in the creature, but say, the goodness and the wisdom of GOD are all this which is in the creature, and much more which I am not able to comprehend; the transcendent degree, and the singularity of these divine perfections, which are communicable, is beyond what we are able to conceive.

The works of GOD, they are likewise unsearchable; the works of creation and of redemption. Job v. 9. "Which doth great things, and unsearchable, marvellous things, past finding out:" and then he instanceth in the works of GOD, Job xxvi. 14. "Lo, these are part of his ways: But how little a portion is heard of him? and the thunder of his voice who can understand?" So that he tells us expressly, we cannot find out the works of GOD, we do but know part of them. The question which he puts, Job xxxvii. 16. "Dost thou know the wondrous works of him that is perfect in knowledge?" can only be answered by the words of the Psalmist, Psal. civ. 24. "O LORD, how wonderful are thy works! in wisdom hast thou made them all." The work of redemption; in this there shines forth such wisdom, mercy, and love, as our understandings cannot reach; this work is called "the wisdom of GOD in a mystery," hidden wisdom, σοφία ἀποκρυμμένη, 1 Cor. ii. 7. The mercy, and grace, and love of it is called, "The riches of GOD's mercy, and the exceeding riches of his grace," Eph. ii. 4, 7. Now
riches

riches is when you cannot tell the utmost of them, *pauperis est numerare*. Eph. iii. 18, 19. "That ye may be able to comprehend with all saints, what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of CHRIST, which passeth knowledge." When we have the largest apprehensions of this love, so that we think we comprehend it and know it, "it passeth knowledge;" yea, the effects of God's power and love, which he manifests in believers, are unspeakable; for "he is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above what we can ask or think, according to the power which worketh in us," Eph. iii. 20. The peace which guards their souls "passeth all understanding," Phil. iv. 7. Those joys which fill their hearts are not to be expressed; 1 Pet. i. 8. we read of "joy unspeakable and full of glory." The happiness which they hope for is inconceivable; it is that which "eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor hath entered into the heart of man, which God hath laid up for us."

The ways of God's providence are not to be traced, Psal. lxxvii. 19. "Thy way is in the sea, and thy paths in the great waters, and thy footsteps are not known." Ecclef. iii. 11. "No man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end." We are but of yesterday, and know nothing. When we look upon God's providence, we take a part from the whole, and consider it by itself, without relation to the whole series of his dispensation; we cannot see the whole of God's providence at one view, and never see from the beginning of the works of God to the end; therefore our knowledge of them must needs be very imperfect, and full of mistakes, and false judgments.

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of things ; we cannot, by our petty and short-sighted designs, judge of the works of God, and the designs of providence ; for “ our ways are not as “ his ways, nor our thoughts as his thoughts ; but “ as the heavens are high above the earth, so are his “ ways above our ways, and his thoughts above our “ thoughts,” Isa. lv. 8, 9. The ways of God’s mercy, Psal. ciii. “ As the heavens are high above “ the earth, so great is God’s mercy.” Psal. cxxxix. 17, 18. “ How precious are thy thoughts unto me ? “ how great is the sum of them ? If I should count “ them, they are more in number than the sand.” And the ways of God’s judgments ; the severity and greatness of his judgment is not known, Psal. xc. “ Who knoweth the power of thine anger ? And “ who may stand before thee when thou art angry ?” And the reasons of his judgments are unsearchable, Psal. xxxvi. 6. “ Thy judgments are a great deep.” Rom. xi. 35. “ How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out !” These are the instances on the part of the object.

2. On the part of the subject, or the persons capable of knowing God in any measure. The perfect knowledge of God is above a finite creature’s understanding. Wicked men are ignorant of God, and full of false apprehensions of him ; the scripture gives this description of them ; they are those that “ know not God,” 2 Theff. i. 7. Wicked men are so far from knowing God to perfection, that they have hardly any true knowledge of him ; for as the man himself is, so will God seem to be to him ; the idea and notions which men have of God, is but the picture of their own complexion. To a true knowledge there is required likeness ; a man’s mind must be like the thing he would understand ; thereg

therefore the apostle tells us, "the natural," or "animal man, doth not receive the things of God," he is not capable of them, because his mind is unsuitable to them, he is *πλήρης τοῦ σώματος*, full of body, and he cannot relish spiritual things; even those natural notions which wicked men have of God, are strangely tinctured and obscured by the temper of the man; they are *lux sepulta in opacâ materiâ*, light buried and hid in matter and darkness, in the blackness of a foul and impure heart; so that there is no question of them, whether they comprehend God or not.

But good men "cannot find out God," they have some false apprehensions of him; all their apprehensions are dark, have much of obscurity in them; they know God to salvation, but not to perfection; in this life we do but know God in part, that is, in comparison of the knowledge which our natures are capable of.

But I will instance yet higher; the angels and the spirits of just men made perfect, though they have true apprehensions of God, yet they do not arrive to perfect knowledge of him, they cannot *pervestigare ultima*, know the utmost of God; the cherubims themselves are continually looking at the mercy seat. To which the apostle alludes, 1 Pet. i. 12. when he tells us, the mystery of God's mercy in the gospel was a thing which the angels desired to pry into. In heaven "that which is in part shall be done away," that is, our knowledge shall be as perfect as our natures are capable; but it shall be finite. When we shall "see God face to face," that is, have an immediate vision of him, "and see him as he is," that is, not having our understandings tinctured by any lust or passion that may darken our mind, or misrepresent the object; for the apostle tells us, "we shall see him, be-

“cause we shall be like him ;” yet then we shall have short and undequat apprehensions of him, we shall still retain our limited natures and finite understandings.

II. By way of conviction. Dost thou know perfectly the nature of a finite spirit, the perfection and the power of an angel, how being immaterial they can act upon matter, and move that which can make no resistance to a spirit? Dost thou know how they can move themselves to a great distance in a moment, and dart themselves from one part of the world to another? Dost thou know how man is “formed in “the lowest parts of the earth,” as the Psalmist expresseth it; and the curious frame of our bodies is wrought from such rude principles in so dark a shop? Canst thou give an account how the soul is united to the body, by what bands or holds a spirit is so closely and intimately conjoined to matter? Dost thou know how thy self understandest any thing, and canst retain the distinct ideas and notions of so many objects without confusion? Dost thou know the least parts of matter, how they are knit together; and by what cement they cleave so fast to one another, that they can hardly be separated?

Now if the creatures be so unsearchable, and the knowledge of these be too hard for thee; is not the creator of them much more incomprehensible, who possesseth all these perfections which he communicates, and many which cannot be communicated to a creature? If in natural and sensible things, *maxima pars eorum quæ scimus, est minima pars eorum quæ nescimus*; how much more is it true of God, that our ignorance is more than our knowledge; when the whole earth and all the creatures bear no proportion to him? Isa. xl. 15, 17. “Behold all the nations “of the earth are as the drop of the bucket, and as “the

“ the small dust of the balance ; all nations before
“ him are nothing, and are accounted to him less
“ than nothing.”

III. By shewing you the clear reason of it, which is this, the disproportion between the faculty and the object, the finiteness of our understandings, and the infiniteness of the divine nature and perfections. “ God is greater than our hearts,” and therefore as he knows more than we do, as the apostle reasons, 1 John iii. 20. so he is more than can be known by us ; he is too vast an object for our understanding to entertain, for our minds to receive. Thou may’st as well mete out the heaven with a span, and measure the waters in the hollow of thy hand, and comprehend the dust of the earth in a little urn, and weigh the mountains in scales, and the hills in a little balance, as think to circumscribe God in the narrow limits of thy thoughts, or to bring that which is infinite within the compass of that which is finite.

And there is not only the vastness and greatness of the object ; but the glory and resplendency of it, does so dazzle our sight, that we cannot perfectly see it, 2 Tim. vi. 16. “ He dwelleth in light which no man
“ can approach unto, whom no man hath seen, nor
“ can see.” As God is too big, so he is too bright an object for our understandings ; the presence of his glory over-powers our minds, and bears down our faculties, and conquers our understandings.

I come now to apply this doctrine of the incomprehensibleness of the divine nature. If the nature, and perfections, and ways, and works of God be incomprehensible, and past finding out ;

I. It calls for our admiration, and veneration, and reverence. These are the best apprehensions of him that is incomprehensible ; a silent veneration of his
excel-

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excellencies, is the best acknowledgment of them. We must admire what we cannot apprehend or express, Zach. ix. 17. "How great is his goodness, "and how great is his beauty?" The best way to celebrate the praises of God, is that which Nehemiah useth, Nehem. ix. 5. "And blessed be thy "glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing "and praise." Whenever we speak or think of God, we necessarily detract from his perfections; but even this necessity is glorious to him, and this speaks his perfection, that the highest finite understanding must have imperfect thoughts of him.

We should make up in reverence and veneration what we fall short of in knowledge. Reverence is an acknowledgment of distance; by our reverence of the divine majesty, we should best awe our hearts, in a sense of the distance which is between his infinite nature and perfection, and our finite apprehensions. Worldly greatness will cause wonder, the thoughts of earthly majesty will compose us to reverence; how much more should those excellencies which are beyond what we can imagine! Isa. vi. you have there God represented "sitting upon his throne," and the "seraphims about him," which are described to us as "having each six wings, and with twain "they cover their faces." Creatures of the brightest understanding, and the most exalted purity and holiness, "cover their faces" in the presence of God's glory, they choose rather to venerate God than look upon him.

II. This calls for humility and modesty. The consideration of God's unsearchable perfections should make "the haughtiness of man to stoop, and bring "down his proud looks, and God alone should be "exalted." The thought of God's excellency should

should abase us, and make us "vile in our own eyes," it should make all those petty excellencies that we pride ourselves in, to vanish and disappear. "Those treasures of wisdom and knowledge" which are in God, should "hide pride from man." It should hide those little parts and gifts which we are so apt to glory in, as the sun hides the stars. When we consider God, we should be so far from admiring ourselves, that we should with an humble thankfulness wonder that God should regard such inconsiderable nothings as we are, Psal. viii. 1, 3, 4. "O LORD our God, how excellent is thy name in all the earth, who hast set thy glory above the heavens! When I consider the heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars which thou hast ordained; what is man, that thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him? He that considers the glory of God, and the greatness of his works, will think so meanly of himself, that he will be astonished that God should mind him or visit him. This is a noble strain of humility in David, by which he acknowledgeth that the greatest king of the earth, how considerable soever he may be in respect of men, is but a pitiful thing to God.

When we speak to God, we should do it with great humility, Eccles. v. 2, 3. "Let thy words be few, for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth." We should say to God, Job xxxvii. 19. "Teach us what we shall say unto thee, for we cannot order our speech by reason of darkness." And when we think or speak of him, we should do it with great modesty, we should not rashly pronounce or determine any thing concerning God. Simonides being asked, what God was? desired one day's time
to

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to consider, then he desired two, and then four: The more we think of God, the less peremptory shall we be in defining him. He that considers that God is incomprehensible, will not pretend to know all the ways of infinite knowledge, and the utmost of infinite power, and all the reasons of God's ways and providences. He that rightly values his own short understanding, and the unlimited perfections of God, will not be apt to say, this God cannot do, this he cannot know, such ways are not agreeable to his wisdom. He that knows God and himself, will be modest in these cases, he will ἐπέχειν, abstain from all peremptory pronouncing in these matters; he considers that one man many times differs so much from another in knowledge and skill of working, that he can do those things which another believes impossible: but we have pitiful thoughts of God, if we think the difference between one man and another is any thing to the vast distance that is between the divine understanding and our ignorance, the divine power and our weakness, the wisdom of God and the folly of men.

III. The incomprehensibleness of God's perfections calls for the highest degree of our affection. How should we fear this great glorious God! Psal. xc. 11. "Who knoweth the power of thine anger? even according to thy fear, so is thy wrath." Fear is the most infinite of all our passions, and fills us with the most endless jealousy and suspicions; God's wrath is greater than our fear, "according to thy fear, so is thy wrath."

How should we love him, when we are astonished with admiration of God's goodness, and say, "how great is thy goodness, and how great is thy beauty? Behold, what manner of love the father hath bestowed

“bestowed upon us!” How great should our love be to him! What manner of love should we return to him!

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This calls for the highest degree of our faith. With what confidence should we rely upon him, “who is able to do for us exceeding abundantly above what we can ask or think!”

To conclude. This requires the highest degree of our service: how should our hearts be “enlarged to run the ways of his commandments,” who hath “laid up for us” such things, “that eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man?”

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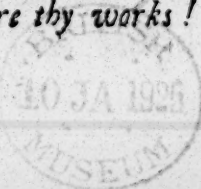
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S E R M. CLIV.

The immensity of the divine nature.

P S A L. cxxxix. 7, 8, 9, 10.

Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. P. 3722.

S E R M. CLV.

The eternity of God.

P S A L M. xc. 2.

Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting thou art GOD. P. 3735.

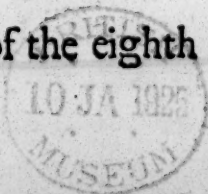
S E R M. CLVI.

The incomprehensibleness of God.

J O B xi. 7.

Canst thou by searching find out GOD? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? P. 3746.

The end of the eighth Volume.



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